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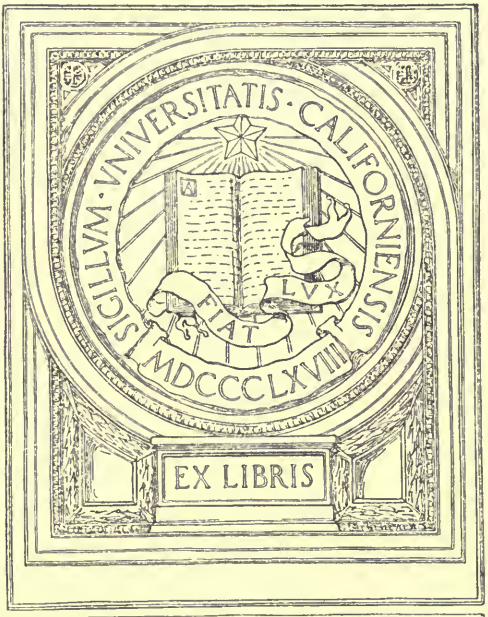

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TO

CAPTAIN GRAHAM MOORE,

OF THE ROYAL NAVY.

WHEN you were stationed on our coast about twelve years ago, you first recommended to my particular notice the poems of the Ayrshire ploughman, whose works, published for the benefit of his widow and children, I now present to you. In a distant region of the world, whither the service of your country has carried you, you will, I know, receive with kindness this proof of my regard; not perhaps without some surprise on finding that I have been engaged in editing these volumes, nor without some curiosity to know how I was qualified for such an undertaking. These points I will briefly explain.

Having occasion to make an excursion to the county of Dumfries, in the summer of 1792, I had there an opportunity of seeing and conversing with Burns. It has been my fortune to

know some men of high reputation in literature, as well as in public life; but never to meet any one who, in the course of a single interview, communicated to me so strong an impression of the force and versatility of his talents. After this I read the poems then published with greater interest and attention, and with a full conviction that, extraordinary as they are, they afford but an inadequate proof of the powers of their unfortunate author.

Four years afterwards, Burns terminated his career. Among those whom the charms of his genius had attached to him, was one with whom I have been bound in the ties of friendship from early life—Mr. John Syme, of Ryedale. This gentleman after the death of Burns, promoted with the utmost zeal a subscription for the support of the widow and children, to which their relief from immediate distress is to be ascribed; and in conjunction with other friends of this virtuous and destitute family, he projected the publication of these volumes for their benefit, by which the return of want might be prevented or prolonged.

To this last undertaking an editor and biographer was wanting, and Mr. Syme's modesty opposed a barrier to his assuming an office, for which he was in other respects peculiarly qualified.

fied. On this subject he consulted me; and with the hope of surmounting his objections, I offered him my assistance, but in vain. Endeavours were used to procure an editor in other quarters without effect. The task was beset with considerable difficulties, and men of established reputation naturally declined an undertaking, to the performance of which, it was scarcely to be hoped, that general approbation could be obtained by any exertion of judgment or temper.

To such an office, my place of residence, my accustomed studies, and my occupations, were certainly little suited; but the partiality of Mr. Syme thought me in other respects not unqualified; and his solicitations, joined to those of our excellent friend and relation, Mrs. Dunlop, and of other friends of the family of the poet, I have not been able to resist. To remove difficulties which would otherwise have been insurmountable, Mr. Syme and Mr. Gilbert Burns made a journey to Liverpool, where they explained and arranged the manuscripts, and selected such as seemed worthy of the press. From this visit I derived a degree of pleasure which has compensated much of my labour. I had the satisfaction of renewing my personal intercourse with a much valued friend, and of forming an acquaintance with a man, closely allied to Burns in talents as well as in blood, in whose

whose future fortunes the friends of virtue will not, I trust, be uninterested.

The publication of these volumes has been delayed by obstacles which these gentlemen could neither remove nor foresee, and which it would be tedious to enumerate. At length the task is finished. If the part which I have taken shall serve the interests of the family, and receive the approbation of good men, I shall have my recompense. The errors into which I have fallen are not, I hope, very important, and they will be easily accounted for by those who know the circumstances under which this undertaking has been performed. Generous minds will receive the posthumous works of Burns with candour, and even partiality, as the remains of an unfortunate man of genius, published for the benefit of his family—as the stay of the widow and the hope of the fatherless.

To secure the suffrages of such minds, all topics are omitted in the writings, and avoided in the life of Burns, that have a tendency to awake the animosity of party. In perusing the following volumes no offence will be received, except by those to whom even the natural erect aspect of genius is offensive; characters that will scarcely be found among those who are educated to the profession of arms. Such men do

do not court situations of danger, or tread in the paths of glory. They will not be found in your service, which, in our own days, emulates on another element the superior fame of the Macedonian phalanx, or of the Roman legion, and which has lately made the shores of Europe and of Africa resound with the shouts of victory, from the Texel to the Tagus, and from the Tagus to the Nile!

The works of Burns will be received favourably by one who stands in the foremost rank of this noble service, and who deserves his station. On the land or on the sea, I know no man more capable of judging of the character or of the writings of this original genius. Homer, and Shakespeare, and Ossian, cannot always occupy your leisure. These volumes may sometimes engage your attention, while the steady breezes of the tropics swell your sails, and in another quarter of the earth charm you with the strains of nature, or awake in your memory the scenes of your early days. Suffer me to hope that they may sometimes recal to your mind the friend who addresses you, and who bids you—most affectionately—adieu!

J. CURRIE.

LIVERPOOL, 1st May, 1800.

ADVERTISEMENT.

IF the Editor has not mentioned by name the various persons who subscribed to the former Editions, or who promoted the subscription for the support of the Widow and Children of Burns, this has arisen from his not being in possession of the necessary documents. MR. ALEXANDER CUNNINGHAM *ought, however, to have been more particularly distinguished: He was indefatigably zealous in promoting the interest of the Widow and her Children, at a period when such services were highly important, and not a little difficult. The Editor is happy in an opportunity of doing this justice, tardy and imperfect though it be, to an old friend, of the generous qualities of whose heart he retains a just and lasting impression.*

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LIFE

OF

ROBERT BURNS.

PREFATORY REMARKS.

THOUGH the dialect, in which many of the happiest effusions of Robert Burns are composed, be peculiar to Scotland, yet his reputation has extended itself beyond the limits of that country, and his poetry has been admired as the offspring of original genius, by persons of taste in every part of the sister islands. The interest excited by his early death, and the distress of his infant family, have been felt in a remarkable manner wherever his writings have been known: and these posthumous volumes, which give to the world his Works complete, and which, it is hoped, may raise his Widow and Children from penury, are printed and published

lished in England. It seems proper, therefore, to write the memoirs of his life, not with the view of their being read by Scotchmen only, but also by natives of England, and of other countries where the English language is spoken or understood.

Robert Burns was, in reality, what he has been represented to be, a Scottish peasant. To render the incidents of his humble story generally intelligible, it seems, therefore, advisable to prefix some observations on the character and situation of the order to which he belonged—a class of men distinguished by many peculiarities: by this means we shall form a more correct notion of the advantages with which he started, and of the obstacles which he surmounted. A few observations on the Scottish peasantry will not, perhaps, be found unworthy of attention in other respects: and the subject is, in a great measure, new. Scotland has produced persons of high distinction in every branch of philosophy and literature; and her history, while a separate and independent nation, has been successfully explored. But the present character of the people was not then formed; the nation then presented features similar to those which the feudal system and the catholic religion had diffused over Europe, modified, indeed, by the peculiar nature of her territory and climate.

The

The Reformation, by which such important changes were produced on the national character, was speedily followed by the Accession of the Scottish monarchs to the English throne; and the period which elapsed from that Accession to the Union has been rendered memorable, chiefly, by those bloody convulsions in which both divisions of the island were involved, and which, in a considerable degree, concealed from the eye of the historian the domestic history of the people, and the gradual variations in their condition and manners. Since the Union, Scotland, though the seat of two unsuccessful attempts to restore the House of Stuart to the throne, has enjoyed a comparative tranquillity; and it is since this period that the present character of her peasantry has been in a great measure formed, though the political causes affecting it are to be traced to the previous acts of her separate legislature.

A slight acquaintance with the peasantry of Scotland will serve to convince an unprejudiced observer, that they possess a degree of intelligence not generally found among the same class of men in the other countries of Europe. In the very humblest condition of the Scottish peasants, every one can read, and most persons are more or less skilled in writing and arithmetic; and, under the disguise of their uncouth appear-

ance, and of their peculiar manners and dialect, a stranger will discover that they possess a curiosity, and have obtained a degree of information, corresponding to these acquirements.

These advantages they owe to the legal provision made by the parliament of Scotland in 1646, for the establishment of a school in every parish throughout the kingdom, for the express purpose of educating the poor; a law which may challenge comparison with any act of legislation to be found in the records of history, whether we consider the wisdom of the ends in view, the simplicity of the means employed, or the provisions made to render these means effectual to their purpose. This excellent statute was repealed on the accession of Charles II. in 1660, together with all the other laws passed during the commonwealth, as not being sanctioned by the royal assent. It slept during the reigns of Charles and James, but was re-enacted precisely in the same terms, by the Scottish parliament, after the Revolution in 1696; and this is the last provision on the subject. Its effects on the national character may be considered to have commenced about the period of the Union; and doubtless it co-operated with the peace and security arising from that happy event, in producing the extraordinary change in favour of industry and good morals, which the character of

of the common people of Scotland has since undergone.*

The church-establishment of Scotland happily coincides with the institution just mentioned, which may be called its school-establishment. The clergyman, being every where resident in his particular parish, becomes the natural patron and superintendent of the parish-school, and is enabled in various ways to promote the comfort of the teacher, and the proficiency of the scholars. The teacher himself is often a candidate for holy orders, who, during the long course of study and probation required in the Scottish church, renders the time which can be spared from his professional studies, useful to others as well as to himself, by assuming the respectable character of a schoolmaster. It is common for the established schools, even in the country parishes of Scotland, to enjoy the means of classical instruction; and many of the farmers, and some even of the cottagers, submit to much privation, that they may obtain, for one of their sons at least, the precarious advantage of a learned education. The difficulty to be surmounted arises, indeed, not from the expense of instructing their children, but from the charge of supporting them. In the country parish-schools, the English language

* *See Appendix, No.* I. *Note* A.

guage, writing, and accounts, are generally taught at the rate of six shillings, and Latin at the rate of ten or twelve shillings, per annum. In the towns the prices are somewhat higher.

It would be improper in this place to inquire minutely into the degree of instruction received at these seminaries, or to attempt any precise estimate of its effects, either on the individuals who are the subjects of this instruction, or on the community to which they belong. That it is on the whole favourable to industry and morals, though doubtless with some individual exceptions, seems to be proved by the most striking and decisive appearance; and it is equally clear, that it is the cause of that spirit of emigration and of adventure so prevalent among the Scotch. Knowledge has, by Lord Verulam, been denominated power; by others it has, with less propriety, been denominated virtue or happiness: we may with confidence consider it has motion. A human being, in proportion as he is informed, has his wishes enlarged, as well as the means of gratifying those wishes. He may be considered as taking within the sphere of his vision a large portion of the globe on which we tread, and discovering advantage at a greater distance on its surface. His desires or ambition, once excited, are stimulated by his imagination; and distant and uncertain objects, giving freer scope to the operation of this faculty,

culty, often acquire, in the mind of the youthful adventurer, an attraction from their very distance and uncertainty. If, therefore, a greater degree of instruction be given to the peasantry of a country comparatively poor, in the neighbourhood of other countries rich in natural and acquired advantages; and if the barriers be removed that kept them separate; emigration from the former to the latter will take place to a certain extent, by laws nearly as uniform as those by which heat diffuses itself among surrounding bodies, or water finds its level when left to its natural course. By the articles of the Union, the barrier was broken down which divided the two British nations, and knowledge and poverty poured the adventurous natives of the north over the fertile plains of England, and more especially, over the colonies which she had settled in the east and in the west. The stream of population continues to flow from the north to the south; for the causes that originally impelled it, continue to operate; and the richer country is constantly invigorated by the accession of an informed and hardy race of men, educated in poverty, and prepared for hardship and danger, patient of labour, and prodigal of life.*

The

* *See Appendix, No.* I. *Note* B.

The preachers of the Reformation in Scotland were disciples of Calvin, and brought with them the temper as well as the tenets of that celebrated heresiarch. The presbyterian form of worship and of church government was endeared to the people, from its being established by themselves. It was endeared to them, also, by the struggle it had to maintain with the Catholic and the Protestant episcopal churches, over both of which, after a hundred years of fierce, and sometimes bloody contention, it finally triumphed, receiving the countenance of government, and the sanction of law. During this long period of contention and of suffering, the temper of the people became more and more obstinate and bigoted; and the nation received that deep tinge of fanaticism, which coloured their public transactions as well as their private virtues, and of which evident traces may be found in our own times. When the public schools were established, the instruction communicated in them partook of the religious character of the people. The Catechism of the Westminster Divines was the universal school-book, and was put into the hands of the young peasant as soon as he had acquired a knowledge of his alphabet; and his first exercise in the art of reading introduced him to the most mysterious doctrines of the Christian faith. This practice is continued in our own times. After the Assembly's Catechism, the Proverbs of Solomon,

Solomon, and the New and Old Testament, follow in regular succession; and the scholar departs, gifted with the knowledge of the sacred writings, and receiving their doctrines according to the interpretation of the Westminster Confession of Faith. Thus, with the instruction of infancy in the schools of Scotland, are blended the dogmas of the national church; and hence the first and most constant exercise of ingenuity among the peasantry of Scotland, is displayed in religious disputation. With a strong attachment to the national creed, is conjoined a bigoted preference of certain forms of worship; the source of which would be often altogether obscure, if we did not recollect that the ceremonies of the Scottish Church were framed in direct opposition, in every point, to those of the Church of Rome.

The eccentricities of conduct, and singularities of opinion and manners, which characterized the English sectaries in the last century, afforded a subject for the comic muse of Butler, whose pictures lose their interest, since their archetypes are lost. Some of the peculiarities common among the more rigid disciples of Calvinism in Scotland, in the present times, have given scope to the ridicule of Burns, whose humour is equal to Butler's, and whose drawings from living manners are singularly expressive and

and exact. Unfortunately the correctness of his taste did not always correspond with the strength of his genius; and hence some of the most exquisite of his comic productions are rendered unfit for the light.*

The information and the religious education of the peasantry of Scotland, promote sedateness of conduct, and habits of thought and reflection.—These good qualities are not counteracted by the establishment of poor laws, which, while they reflect credit on the benevolence, detract from the wisdom of the English legislature. To make a legal provision for the inevitable distresses of the poor, who by age or disease are rendered incapable of labour, may indeed seem an indispensable duty of society; and if, in the execution of a plan for this purpose, a distinction could be introduced, so as to exclude from its benefits those whose sufferings are produced by idleness or profligacy, such an institution would perhaps be as rational as humane. But to lay a general tax on property for the support of poverty, from whatever cause proceeding, is a measure full of danger. It must operate in a considerable degree as an incitement

* *Holy Willie's Prayer, Rob the Rhymer's Welcome to his Bastard Child, Epistle to J. Gowdie, the Holy Tulzie, &c.*

citement to idleness, and a discouragement to industry. It takes away from vice and indolence the prospect of their most dreaded consequences, and from virtue and industry their peculiar sanctions. In many cases it must render the rise in the price of labour, not a blessing, but a curse to the labourer; who, if there be an excess in what he earns beyond his immediate necessities, may be expected to devote this excess to his present gratification; trusting to the provision made by law for his own and his family's support, should disease suspend, or death terminate his labours. Happily in Scotland, the same legislature which established a system of instruction for the poor, resisted the introduction of a legal provision for the support of poverty; the establishment of the first, and the rejection of the last, were equally favourable to industry and good morals; and hence it will not appear surprising, if the Scottish peasantry have a more than usual share of prudence and reflection, if they approach nearer than persons of their order usually do, to the definition of a man, that of "a being that looks before and after." These observations must indeed be taken with many exceptions: the favourable operation of the causes just mentioned is counteracted by others of an opposite tendency; and the subject, if fully examined, would lead to discussions of great extent.

When

When the Reformation was established in Scotland, instrumental music was banished from the churches, as savouring too much of "profane minstrelsy." Instead of being regulated by an instrument, the voices of the congregation are led and directed by a person under the name of a precentor; and the people are all expected to join in the tune which he chooses for the psalm which is to be sung. Church-music is therefore a part of the education of the peasantry of Scotland, in which they are usually instructed in the long winter-nights by the parish schoolmaster, who is generally the precentor, or by itinerant teachers more celebrated for their powers of voice. This branch of education had, in the last reign, fallen into some neglect, but was revived about thirty or forty years ago, when the music itself was reformed and improved. The Scottish system of psalmody is however radically bad. Destitute of taste or harmony, it forms a striking contrast with the delicacy and pathos of the profane airs. Our poet, it will be found, was taught church-music, in which, however, he made little proficiency.

That dancing should also be very generally a part of the education of the Scottish peasantry, will surprise those who have only seen this description of men; and still more those who

who reflect on the rigid spirit of Calvinism with which the nation is so deeply affected, and to which this recreation is so strongly abhorrent. The winter is also the season when they acquire dancing, and indeed almost all their other instruction. They are taught to dance by persons generally of their own number, many of whom work at daily labour during the summer months. The school is usually a barn, and the arena for the performers is generally a clay floor. The dome is lighted by candles stuck in one end of a cloven stick, the other end of which is thrust into the wall. Reels, strathspeys, country-dances, and hornpipes, are here practised. The jig, so much in favour among the English peasantry, has no place among them. The attachment of the people of Scotland of every rank, and particularly of the peasantry, to this amusement, is very great. After the labours of the day are over, young men and women walk many miles, in the cold and dreary nights of winter, to these country dancing-schools; and the instant that the violin sounds a Scottish air, fatigue seems to vanish, the toil-bent rustic becomes erect, his features brighten with sympathy; every nerve seems to thrill with sensation, and every artery to vibrate with life. These rustic performers are indeed less to be admired for grace, than for agility and animation, and their accurate observance

observance of time. Their modes of dancing, as well as their tunes, are common to every rank in Scotland, and are now generally known. In our own day they have penetrated into England, and have established themselves even in the circle of Royalty. In another generation they will be naturalized in every part of the island.

The prevalence of this taste, or rather passion for dancing, among a people so deeply tinctured with the spirit and doctrines of Calvin, is one of those contradictions which the philosophic observer so often finds in national character and manners. It is probably to be ascribed to the Scottish music, which, throughout all its varieties, is so full of sensibility, and which, in its livelier strains, awakes those vivid emotions that find in dancing their natural solace and relief.

This triumph of the music of Scotland over the spirit of the established religion, has not, however, been obtained without long-continued and obstinate struggles. The numerous sectaries who dissent from the establishment on account of the relaxation which they perceive, or think they perceive, in the Church, from her original doctrines and discipline, universally condemn the practice of dancing, and the schools where it is taught; and the more elderly

derly and serious part of the people, of every persuasion, tolerate rather than approve these meetings of the young of both sexes, where dancing is practised to their spirit-stirring music, where care is dispelled, toil is forgotten, and prudence itself is sometimes lulled to sleep.

The Reformation, which proved fatal to the rise of the other fine arts in Scotland, probably impeded, but could not obstruct, the progress of its music; a circumstance that will convince the impartial inquirer, that this music not only existed previously to that æra, but had taken a firm hold of the nation; thus affording a proof of its antiquity, stronger than any produced by the researches of our antiquaries.

The impression which the Scottish music has made on the people, is deepened by its union with the national songs, of which various collections of unequal merit are before the public. These songs, like those of other nations, are many of them humorous, but they chiefly treat of love, war, and drinking. Love is the subject of the greater proportion. Without displaying the higher powers of the imagination, they exhibit a perfect knowledge of the human heart, and breathe a spirit of affection, and sometimes of delicate and romantic tenderness, not to be surpassed in modern poetry, and which the

the more polished strains of antiquity have seldom possessed.

The origin of this amatory character in the rustic muse of Scotland, or of the greater number of these love-songs themselves, it would be difficult to trace; they have accumulated in the silent lapse of time, and it is now perhaps impossible to give an arrangement of them in the order of their date, valuable as such a record of taste and manners would be. Their present influence on the character of the nation is, however, great and striking. To them we must attribute, in a great measure, the romantic passion which so often characterizes the attachments of the humblest of the people of Scotland, to a degree, that if we mistake not, is seldom found in the same rank of society in other countries. The pictures of love and happiness exhibited in their rural songs, are early impressed on the mind of the peasant, and are rendered more attractive from the music with which they are united. They associate themselves with his own youthful emotions; they elevate the object as well as the nature of his attachment; and give to the impressions of sense the beautiful colours of imagination. Hence in the course of his passion, a Scottish peasant often exerts a spirit of adventure, of which a Spanish cavalier need not be ashamed.

After

After the labours of the day are over, he sets out for the habitation of his mistress, perhaps at many miles distance, regardless of the length or the dreariness of the way. He approaches her in secresy, under the disguise of night. A signal at the door or window, perhaps agreed on, and understood by none but her, gives information of his arrival; and sometimes it is repeated again and again, before the capricious fair one will obey the summons. But if she favours his addresses, she escapes unobserved, and receives the vows of her lover under the gloom of twilight, or the deeper shade of night. Interviews of this kind are the subjects of many of the Scottish songs, some of the most beautiful of which Burns has imitated or improved. In the art which they celebrate he was perfectly skilled; he knew and had practised all its mysteries. Intercourse of this sort is indeed universal even in the humblest condition of man in every region of the earth. But it is not unnatural to suppose that it may exist in a greater degree, and in a more romantic form, among the peasantry of a country who are supposed to be more than commonly instructed; who find in their rural songs expressions for their youthful emotions; and in whom the embers of passion are continually fanned by the breathings of a music full of tenderness and sensibility. The direct influence of physical causes on the attachment

between the sexes is comparatively small, but it is modified by moral causes beyond any other affection of the mind. Of these, music and poetry are the chief. Among the snows of Lapland, and under the burning sun of Angola, the savage is seen hastening to his mistress, and every where he beguiles the weariness of his journey with poetry and song.*

In appreciating the happiness and virtue of a community, there is perhaps no single criterion on which so much dependence may be placed, as the state of the intercourse between the sexes. Where this displays ardour of attachment, accompanied by purity of conduct, the character and the influence of women rise in society, our imperfect nature mounts in the scale of moral excellence, and, from the source of this single affection, a stream of felicity descends, which branches into a thousand rivulets that enrich and adorn the field of life. Where the attachment between the sexes sinks into an appetite, the heritage of our species is comparatively poor,

* The North-American Indians, among whom the attachment between the sexes is said to be weak, and love, in the purer sense of the word, unknown, seem nearly unacquainted with the charms of poetry and music. *See Weld's Tour.*

poor, and man approaches the condition of *the brutes that perish.* "If we could with safety indulge the pleasing supposition that Fingal lived and that Ossian sung,"* Scotland, judging from this criterion, might be considered as ranking high in happiness and virtue in very remote ages. To appreciate her situation by the same criterion in our own times, would be a delicate and a difficult undertaking. After considering the probable influence of her popular songs and her national music, and examining how far the effects to be expected from these are supported by facts, the inquirer would also have to examine the influence of other causes, and particularly of her civil and ecclesiastical institutions, by which the character, and even the manners of a people, though silently and slowly, are often powerfully controlled. In the point of view in which we are considering the subject, the ecclesiastical establishments of Scotland may be supposed peculiarly favourable to purity of conduct. The dissoluteness of manners among the catholic clergy, which preceded, and in some measure produced the reformation, led to an extraordinary strictness on the part of the reformers, and especially in that particular in which the licentiousness of the clergy had been carried to its greatest height—the intercourse

* Gibbon.

between the sexes. On this point, as on all others connected with austerity of manners, the disciples of Calvin assumed a greater severity than those of the protestant episcopal church. The punishment of illicit connexion between the sexes was, throughout all Europe, a province which the clergy assumed to themselves; and the church of Scotland, which at the reformation renounced so many powers and privileges, at that period took this crime under her more especial jurisdiction.* Where pregnancy takes place without marriage, the condition of the female causes the discovery, and it is on her, therefore, in the first instance, that the clergy and elders of the church exercise their zeal. After examination before the kirk-session touching the circumstances of her guilt, she must endure a public penance, and sustain a public rebuke from the pulpit, for three Sabbaths successively, in the face of the congregation to which she belongs, and thus have her weakness exposed, and her shame blazoned. The sentence is the same with respect to the male; but how much lighter the punishment! It is well known that this dreadful law, worthy of the iron minds of Calvin and of Knox, has often led to consequences, at the very mention of which human nature recoils.

While

* *See Appendix, No.* I. *Note* C.

While the punishment of incontinence prescribed by the institutions of Scotland, is severe, the culprits have an obvious method of avoiding it, afforded them by the law respecting marriage, the validity of which requires neither the ceremonies of the church, nor any other ceremonies, but simply the deliberate acknowledgment of each other as husband and wife, made by the parties before witnesses, or in any other way that gives legal evidence of such an acknowledgment having taken place. And as the parties themselves fix the date of their marriage, an opportunity is thus given to avoid the punishment, and repair the consequences, of illicit gratification. Such a degree of laxity respecting so serious a contract might produce much confusion in the descent of property, without a still farther indulgence; but the law of Scotland legitimating all children born before wedlock, on the subsequent marriage of their parents, renders the actual date of the marriage itself of little consequence.* Marriages contracted in Scotland without the ceremonies of the church are considered as *irregular*, and the parties usually submit to a *rebuke* for their conduct, in the face of their respective congregations, which is not however necessary to render the marriage valid. Burns, whose marriage,

* *See Appendix, No.* 1. *Note* D.

marriage, it will appear, was *irregular*, does not seem to have undergone this part of the discipline of the church.

Thus, though the institutions of Scotland are in many particulars favourable to a conduct among the peasantry founded on foresight and reflection, on the subject of marriage the reverse of this is true. Irregular marriages, it may be naturally supposed, are often improvident ones, in whatever rank of society they occur. The children of such marriages, poorly endowed by their parents, find a certain degree of instruction of easy acquisition; but the comforts of life, and the gratifications of ambition, they find of more difficult attainment in their native soil; and thus the marriage laws of Scotland conspire with other circumstances, to produce that habit of emigration, and spirit of adventure, for which the people are so remarkable.

The manners and appearance of the Scottish peasantry do not bespeak to a stranger the degree of their cultivation. In their own country, their industry is inferior to that of the same description of men in the southern division of the island. Industry and the useful arts reached Scotland later than England; and though their advance has been rapid there, the effects produced are as yet far inferior both in reality and

in

in appearance. The Scottish farmers have in general neither the opulence nor the comforts of those of England, neither vest the same capital in the soil, nor receive from it the same return. Their clothing, their food, and their habitations, are almost every where inferior.* Their appearance in these respects corresponds with the appearance of their country; and under the operation of patient industry, both are improving. Industry and the useful arts came later into Scotland than into England, because the security of property came later. With causes of internal agitation and warfare, similar to those which occurred to the more southern nation, the people of Scotland were exposed to more imminent hazards, and more extensive and destructive spoliation, from external war. Occupied in the maintenance of their independence against their more powerful neighbours, to this were necessarily sacrificed the arts of peace, and at certain periods, the flower of their population. And when the union of the crowns produced a security from national wars with England, for the century

* These remarks are confined to the class of farmers; the same corresponding inferiority will not be found in the condition of the cottagers and labourers, at least in the article of food, as those who examine this subject impartially will soon discover.

century succeeding, the civil wars common to both divisions of the island, and the dependence, perhaps the necessary dependence of the Scottish councils on those of the more powerful kingdom, counteracted this disadvantage. Even the union of the British nations was not, from obvious causes, immediately followed by all the benefits which it was ultimately destined to produce. At length, however, these benefits are distinctly felt, and generally acknowledged. Property is secure; manufactures and commerce increasing, and agriculture is rapidly improving in Scotland. As yet, indeed, the farmers are not, in general, enabled to make improvements out of their own capitals, as in England; but the landholders, who have seen and felt the advantages resulting from them, contribute towards them with a liberal hand. Hence property, as well as population, is accumulating rapidly on the Scottish soil; and the nation, enjoying a great part of the blessings of Englishmen, and retaining several of their own happy institutions, might be considered, if confidence could be placed in human foresight, to be as yet only in an early stage of their progress. Yet there are obstructions in their way. To the cultivation of the soil are opposed the extent and the strictness of the entails; to the improvement of the people, the rapidly increasing use of spirituous liquors, a detestable practice, which includes in its consequences

sequences almost every evil, physical and moral.* The peculiarly social disposition of the Scottish peasantry exposes them to this practice. This disposition, which is fostered by their national songs and music, is perhaps characteristic of the nation at large. Though the source of many pleasures, it counteracts by its consequences the effects of their patience, industry, and frugality, both at home and abroad, of which those especially who have witnessed the progress of Scotsmen in other countries, must have known many striking instances.

Since the Union, the manners and language of the people of Scotland have no longer a standard among themselves, but are tried by the standard of the nation to which they are united. —Though their habits are far from being flexible, yet it is evident that their manners and dialect are undergoing a rapid change. Even the farmers of the present day appear to have less of the peculiarities of their country in their speech, than

* The amount of the duty on spirits distilled in Scotland is now upwards of 250,000l. annually. In 1777, it did not reach 8,000l. The rate of the duty has indeed been raised, but, making every allowance, the increase of consumption must be enormous. This is independent of the duty on malt, &c., malt-liquor, imported spirits, and wine.

than the men of letters of the last generation. Burns, who never left the island, nor penetrated farther into England than Carlisle on the one hand, or Newcastle on the other, had less of the Scottish dialect than Hume, who lived for many years in the best society of England and France; or perhaps than Robertson, who wrote the English language in a style of such purity; and if he had been in other respects fitted to take a lead in the British House of Commons, his pronunciation would neither have fettered his eloquence, nor deprived it of its due effect.

A striking particular in the character of the Scottish peasantry, is one which it is hoped will not be lost—the strength of their domestic attachments. The privations to which many parents submit for the good of their children, and particularly to obtain for them instruction, which they consider as the chief good, has already been noticed. If their children live and prosper, they have their certain reward, not merely as witnessing, but as sharing of their prosperity. Even in the humblest ranks of the peasantry, the earnings of the children may generally be considered as at the disposal of their parents; perhaps in no country is so large a portion of the wages of labour applied to the support and comfort of those whose days of labour are

are past. A similar strength of attachment extends through all the domestic relations.

Our poet partook largely of this amiable characteristic of his humble compeers; he was also strongly tinctured with another striking feature which belongs to them, a partiality for his native country, of which many proofs may be found in his writings. This, it must be confessed, is a very strong and general sentiment among the natives of Scotland, differing however in its character, according to the character of the different minds in which it is found; in some appearing a selfish prejudice, in others, a generous affection.

An attachment to the land of their birth is, indeed, common to all men. It is found among the inhabitants of every region of the earth, from the arctic to the antarctic circle, in all the vast variety of climate, of surface, and of civilization. To analyze this general sentiment, to trace it through the mazes of association up to the primary affection in which it has its source, would neither be a difficult nor an unpleasing labour. On the first consideration of the subject, we should perhaps expect to find this attachment strong in proportion to the physical advantages of the soil; but inquiry, far from confirming this supposition, seems rather to lead

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to an opposite conclusion—In those fertile regions where beneficent nature yields almost spontaneously whatever is necessary to human wants, patriotism, as well as every other generous sentiment, seems weak and languid. In countries less richly endowed, where the comforts, and even necessaries of life, must be purchased by patient toil, the affections of the mind, as well as the faculties of the understanding, improve under exertion, and patriotism flourishes amidst its kindred virtues. Where it is necessary to combine for mutual defence, as well as for the supply of common wants, mutual goodwill springs from mutual difficulties and labours, the social affections unfold themselves, and extend from the men with whom we live, to the soil on which we tread. It will perhaps be found, indeed, that our affections cannot be originally called forth, but by objects capable, or supposed capable, of feeling our sentiments, and of returning them; but when once excited, they are strengthened by exercise, they are expanded by the powers of imagination, and seize more especially on those inanimate parts of creation, which form the theatre on which we have first felt the alternations of joy and sorrow, and first tasted the sweets of sympathy and regard. If this reasoning be just, the love of our country, although modified, and even extinguished in individuals by the chances and changes of life, may

may be presumed, in our general reasonings, to be strong among a people, in proportion to their social, and more especially to their domestic affections. In free governments it is found more active than in despotic ones, because, as the individual becomes of more consequence in the community, the community becomes of more consequence to him; in small states it is generally more active than in large ones, for the same reason, and also because the independence of a small community being maintained with difficulty, and frequently endangered, sentiments of patriotism are more frequently excited. In mountainous countries it is generally found more active than in plains, because there the necessities of life often require a closer union of the inhabitants; and more especially because in such countries, though less populous than plains, the inhabitants, instead of being scattered equally over the whole, are usually divided into small communities on the sides of their separate valleys, and on the banks of their respective streams; situations well calculated to call forth and to concentrate the social affections, amidst scenery that acts most powerfully on the sight, and makes a lasting impression on the memory. It may also be remarked that mountainous countries are often peculiarly calculated to nourish sentiments of national pride and independence, from the influence of history on the affections of the mind.

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In such countries, from their natural strength, inferior nations have maintained their independence against their more powerful neighbours, and valour, in all ages, has made its most successful efforts against oppression. Such countries present the fields of battle, where the tide of invasion was rolled back, and where the ashes of those rest, who have died in defence of their nation!

The operation of the various causes we have mentioned is doubtless more general and more permanent, where the scenery of a country, the peculiar manners of its inhabitants, and the martial achievements of their ancestors are embodied in national songs, and united to national music. By this combination, the ties that attach men to the land of their birth are multiplied and strengthened; and the images of infancy, strongly associating with the generous affections, resist the influence of time, and of new impressions; they often survive in countries far distant, and amidst far different scenes, to the latest periods of life, to sooth the heart with the pleasures of memory, when those of hope die away.

If this reasoning be just, it will explain to us why, among the natives of Scotland, even of cultivated minds, we so generally find a partial attachment to the land of their birth, and why this

this is so strongly discoverable in the writings of Burns, who joined to the higher powers of the understanding the most ardent affections. Let not men of reflection think it a superfluous labour to trace the rise and progress of a character like his. Born in the condition of a peasant, he rose by the force of his mind into distinction and influence, and in his works has exhibited what are so rarely found, the charms of original genius. With a deep insight into the human heart, his poetry exhibits high powers of imagination—it displays, and as it were embalms, the peculiar manners of his country; and it may be considered as a monument, not to his own name only, but to the expiring genius of an ancient and once independent nation. In relating the incidents of his life, candour will prevent us from dwelling invidiously on those failings which justice forbids us to conceal; we will tread lightly over his yet warm ashes, and respect the laurels that shelter his untimely grave.

THE LIFE

OF

ROBERT BURNS.

ROBERT BURNS was, as is well known, the son of a farmer in Ayrshire, and afterwards himself a farmer there; but, having been unsuccessful, he was about to emigrate to Jamaica. He had previously, however, attracted some notice by his poetical talents in the vicinity where he lived; and having published a small volume of his poems at Kilmarnock, this drew upon him more general attention. In consequence of the encouragement he received, he repaired to Edinburgh, and there published, by subscription, an improved and enlarged edition of his poems, which met with extraordinary success. By the profits arising from the sale of

this edition, he was enabled to enter on a farm in Dumfries-shire; and having married a person to whom he had been long attached, he retired to devote the remainder of his life to agriculture. He was again, however, unsuccessful; and, abandoning his farm, he removed into the town of Dumfries, where he filled an inferior office in the excise, and where he terminated his life in July, 1796, in his thirty-eighth year.

The strength and originality of his genius procured him the notice of many persons distinguished in the republic of letters, and, among others, that of Dr. Moore, well known for his *Views of Society and Manners on the Continent of Europe*, for his *Zeluco*, and various other works. To this gentleman our poet addressed a letter, after his first visit to Edinburgh, giving a history of his life, up to the period of his writing. In a composition never intended to see the light, elegance, or perfect correctness of composition will not be expected. These, however, will be compensated by the opportunity of seeing our poet, as he gives the incidents of his life, unfold the peculiarities of his character with all the careless vigour and open sincerity of his mind.

" *Mauchline, 2d August,* 1787.

" SIR,

" FOR some months past I have been rambling over the country; but I am now confined with some lingering complaints, originating, as I take it, in the stomach. To divert my spirits a little in this miserable fog of *ennui*, I have taken a whim to give you a history of myself. My name has made some little noise in this country; you have done me the honour to interest yourself very warmly in my behalf; and I think a faithful account of what character of a man I am, and how I came by that character, may perhaps amuse you in an idle moment, I will give you an honest narrative; though I know it will be often at my own expense;—for I assure you, Sir, I have, like Solomon, whose character, excepting in the trifling affair of *wisdom*, I sometimes think I resemble,—I have, I say, like him, *turned my eyes to behold madness and folly*, and, like him too, frequently shaken hands with their intoxicating friendship. * * * After you have perused these pages, should you think them trifling and impertinent, I only beg leave to tell you, that the poor author wrote them under

some twitching qualms of conscience, arising from a suspicion that he was doing what he ought not to do; a predicament he has more than once been in before.

"I have not the most distant pretensions to assume that character which the pye-coated guardians of escutcheons call a Gentleman. When at Edinburgh last winter, I got acquainted in the Herald's Office; and, looking through that granary of honours, I there found almost every name in the kingdom; but for me,

"My ancient but ignoble blood
Has crept thro' scoundrels ever since the flood."

Gules, Purpure, Argent, &c. quite disowned me.

"My father was of the north of Scotland, the son of a farmer, and was thrown by early misfortunes on the world at large; where, after many years' wanderings and sojournings, he picked up a pretty large quantity of observation and experience, to which I am indebted for most of my little pretensions to wisdom.—I have met with few who understood *men, their manners, and their ways*, equal to him; but stubborn, ungainly integrity, and headlong, ungovernable irascibility, are disqualifying circumstances;

cumstances; consequently I was born a very poor man's son. For the first six or seven years of my life, my father was gardener to a worthy gentleman of small estate in the neighbourhood of Ayr. Had he continued in that station, I must have marched off to be one of the little underlings about a farm-house; but it was his dearest wish and prayer to have it in his power to keep his children under his own eye till they could discern between good and evil; so, with the assistance of his generous master, my father ventured on a small farm on his estate. At those years I was by no means a favourite with any body. I was a good deal noted for a retentive memory, a stubborn sturdy something in my disposition, and an enthusiastic idiot* piety. I say *idiot* piety, because I was then but a child. Though it cost the schoolmaster some thrashings, I made an excellent English scholar; and by the time I was ten or eleven years of age, I was a critic in substantives, verbs, and particles. In my infant and boyish days, too, I owed much to an old woman who resided in the family, remarkable for her ignorance, credulity and superstition. She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles,

* Idiot *for* idiotic.

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candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantraips, giants, enchanted towers, dragons, and other trumpery. This cultivated the latent seeds of poetry; but had so strong an effect on my imagination, that to this hour, in my nocturnal rambles, I sometimes keep a sharp look-out in suspicious places; and though nobody can be more sceptical than I am in such matters, yet it often takes an effort of philosophy to shake off these idle terrors. The earliest composition that I recollect taking pleasure in, was *The Vision of Mirza*, and a hymn of Addison's, beginning, *How are thy Servants blest, O Lord!* I particularly remember one half-stanza which was music to my boyish ear—

> "For though on dreadful whirls we hung
> High on the broken wave—"

I met with these pieces in *Mason's English Collection*, one of my school-books. The two first books I ever read in private, and which gave me more pleasure than any two books I ever read since, were, *The Life of Hannibal*, and *The History of Sir William Wallace*. Hannibal gave my young ideas such a turn, that I used to strut in raptures up and down after the recruiting drum and bag-pipe, and wish myself tall enough to be a soldier; while the story of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice into my veins, which

which will boil along there till the flood-gates of life shut in eternal rest.

" Polemical divinity about this time was putting the country half-mad; and I, ambitious of shining in conversation parties on Sundays, between sermons, at funerals, &c. used, a few years afterwards, to puzzle Calvinism with so much heat and indiscretion, that I raised a hue and cry of heresy against me, which has not ceased to this hour.

" My vicinity to Ayr was of some advantage to me. My social disposition, when not checked by some modifications of spirited pride, was, like our catechism-definition of infinitude, *without bounds or limits.* I formed several connexions with other younkers who possessed superior advantages, the *youngling* actors, who were busy in the rehearsal of parts in which they were shortly to appear on the stage of life, where, alas! I was destined to drudge behind the scenes. It is not commonly at this green age that our young gentry have a just sense of the immense distance between them and their ragged play-fellows. It takes a few dashes into the world, to give the young great man that proper, decent, unnoticing disregard for the poor insignificant, stupid devils, the mechanics and peasantry around him, who were perhaps born

born in the same village. My young superiors never insulted the *clouterly* appearance of my plough-boy carcase, the two extremes of which were often exposed to all the inclemencies of all the seasons. They would give me stray volumes of books: among them, even then, I could pick up some observations; and one, whose heart I am sure not even the *Mummy Begum* scenes have tainted, helped me to a little French. Parting with these my young friends and benefactors, as they occasionally went off for the East or West Indies, was often to me a sore affliction; but I was soon called to more serious evils. My father's generous master died; the farm proved a ruinous bargain; and, to clench the misfortune, we fell into the hands of a factor, who sat for the picture I have drawn of one in my *Tale of Twa Dogs*. My father was advanced in life when he married; I was the eldest of seven children; and he, worn out by early hardships, was unfit for labour. My father's spirit was soon irritated, but not easily broken. There was a freedom in his lease in two years more; and, to weather these two years, we retrenched our expenses. We lived very poorly: I was a dexterous ploughman, for my age; and the next eldest to me was a brother (Gilbert) who could drive the plough very well, and help me to thrash the corn. A novel-writer might perhaps have viewed these scenes with

with some satisfaction; but so did not I; my indignation yet boils at the recollection of the s——l factor's insolent threatening letters, which used to set us all in tears.

"This kind of life—the cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing moil of a galley-slave, brought me to my sixteenth year; a little before which period I first committed the sin of Rhyme. You know our country custom of coupling a man and woman together as partners in the labours of harvest. In my fifteenth autumn my partner was a bewitching creature, a year younger than myself. My scarcity of English denies me the power of doing her justice in that language; but you know the Scottish idiom—she was a *bonnie, sweet, sonsie lass.* In short, she altogether, unwittingly to herself, initiated me in that delicious passion, which, in spite of acid disappointment, gin-horse prudence, and book-worm philosophy, I hold to be the first of human joys, our dearest blessing here below! How she caught the contagion, I cannot tell: you medical people talk much of infection from breathing the same air, the touch, &c.; but I never expressly said I loved her. Indeed I did not know myself why I liked so much to loiter behind with her, when returning in the evening from our labours; why the tones of her voice made my heart-strings thrill

thrill like an Æolian harp; and particularly why my pulse beat such a furious ratan when I looked and fingered over her little hand to pick out the cruel nettle stings and thistles. Among her other love-inspiring qualities, she sung sweetly; and it was her favourite reel, to which I attempted giving an embodied vehicle in rhyme. I was not so presumptuous as to imagine that I could make verses like printed ones, composed by men who had Greek and Latin; but my girl sung a song, which was said to be composed by a small country laird's son, on one of his father's maids, with whom he was in love! and I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well as he; for, excepting that he could smear sheep, and cast peats, his father living in the moor-lands, he had no more scholar-craft than myself.*

"Thus with me began love and poetry; which at times have been my only, and till within the last twelve months, have been my highest enjoyment. My father struggled on till he reached the freedom in his lease, when he entered on a larger farm, about ten miles farther in the country. The nature of the bargain he made was such as to throw a little ready money into his hands at the commencement of his

* *See Appendix, No.* II. *Note* A.

his lease; otherwise the affair would have been impracticable. For four years we lived comfortably here; but a difference commencing between him and his landlord as to terms, after three years tossing and whirling in the vortex of litigation, my father was just saved from the horrors of a jail by a consumption, which, after two years' promises, kindly stepped in, and carried him away, to *where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.*

" It is during the time that we lived on this farm that my little story is most eventful. I was, at the beginning of this period, perhaps the most ungainly, awkward boy in the parish—no *solitaire* was less acquainted with the ways of the world. What I knew of ancient story was gathered from *Salmon*'s and *Guthrie*'s geographical grammars; and the ideas I had formed of modern manners, of literature, and criticism, I got from the *Spectator*. These, with *Pope's Works*, some plays of *Shakespeare*, *Tull and Dickson on Agriculture*, *The Pantheon*, *Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding*, *Stackhouse's History of the Bible*, *Justice's British Gardener's Directory*, *Bayle's Lectures*, *Allan Ramsay's Works*, *Taylor's Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin*, *A Select Collection of English Songs*, *and Hervey's Meditations*, had formed the whole of my reading. The collection of songs

songs was my *vade mecum.* I pored over them driving my cart, or walking to labour, song by song, verse by verse; carefully noting the true tender, or sublime, from affectation and fustian. I am convinced I owe to this practice much of my critic craft, such as it is.

" In my seventeenth year, to give my manners a brush, I went to a country dancing-school.—My father had an unaccountable antipathy against these meetings; and my going was, what to this moment I repent, in opposition to his wishes. My father, as I said before, was subject to strong passions; from that instance of disobedience in me he took a sort of dislike to me, which I believe was one cause of the dissipation which marked my succeeding years. I say dissipation, comparatively with the strictness, and sobriety, and regularity of presbyterian country life; for though the Will-o'-Wisp meteors of thoughtless whim were almost the sole lights of my path, yet early ingrained piety and virtue kept me for several years afterwards within the line of innocence. The great misfortune of my life was to want an aim. I had felt early some stirrings of ambition, but they were the blind gropings of Homer's Cyclops round the walls of his cave. I saw my father's situation entailed on me perpetual labour. The only two openings by which I could

I could enter the temple of Fortune, was the gate of niggardly economy, or the path of little chicaning bargain-making. The first is so contracted an aperture, I never could squeeze myself into it;—the last I always hated—there was contamination in the very entrance! Thus abandoned of aim or view in life, with a strong appetite for sociability, as well from native hilarity, as from a pride of observation and remark; a constitutional melancholy or hypochondriasm that made me fly solitude; add to these incentives to social life, my reputation for bookish knowledge, a certain wild logical talent, and a strength of thought, something like the rudiments of good sense; and it will not seem surprising that I was generally a welcome guest where I visited, or any great wonder that, always where two or three met together, there was I among them. But far beyond all other impulses of my heart, was *un penchant a l' adorable moitié du genre humain.* My heart was completely tinder, and was eternally lighted up by some goddess or other; and as in every other warfare in this world my fortune was various, sometimes I was received with favour, and sometimes I was mortified with a repulse. At the plough, scythe, or reap-hook, I feared no competitor, and thus I set absolute want at defiance; and as I never cared farther for my labours than while I was in actual exercise, I spent

spent the evenings in the way after my own heart. A country lad seldom carries on a love-adventure without an assisting confidant. I possessed a curiosity, zeal, and intrepid dexterity, that recommended me as a proper second on these occasions; and I dare say, I felt as much pleasure in being in the secret of half the loves of the parish of Tarbolton, as ever did statesman in knowing the intrigues of half the courts of Europe.—The very goose-feather in my hand seems to know instinctively the well-worn path of my imagination, the favourite theme of my song; and is with difficulty restrained from giving you a couple of paragraphs on the love-adventures of my compeers, the humble inmates of the farm-house and cottage; but the grave sons of science, ambition, or avarice, baptize these things by the name of Follies. To the sons and daughters of labour and poverty, they are matters of the most serious nature; to them, the ardent hope, the stolen interview, the tender farewell, are the greatest and most delicious parts of their enjoyments.

"Another circumstance in my life which made some alteration in my mind and manners, was, that I spent my nineteenth summer on a smuggling coast, a good distance from home, at a noted school, to learn mensuration, surveying, dialling, &c., in which I made a pretty good

good progress. But I made a greater progress in the knowledge of mankind. The contraband trade was at that time very successful, and it sometimes happened to me to fall in with those who carried it on. Scenes of swaggering riot and roaring dissipation were till this time new to me; but I was no enemy to social life. Here, though I learnt to fill my glass, and to mix without fear in a drunken squabble, yet I went on with a high hand with my geometry, till the sun entered Virgo, a month which is always a carnival in my bosom, when a charming *filette* who lived next door to the school, overset my trigonometry, and set me off at a tangent from the sphere of my studies. I, however, struggled on with my *sines* and *co-sines* for a few days more; but, stepping into the garden one charming noon to take the sun's altitude, there I met my angel,

> "Like Proserpine, gathering flowers,
> Herself a fairer flower——"

"It was in vain to think of doing any more good at school. The remaining week I staid, I did nothing but craze the faculties of my soul about her, or steal out to meet her; and the two last nights of my stay in the country, had sleep been a mortal sin, the image of this modest and innocent girl had kept me guiltless.

"I returned

"I returned home very considerably improved. My reading was enlarged with the very important addition of Thomson's and Shenstone's Works; I had seen human nature in a new phasis; and I engaged several of my school-fellows to keep up a literary correspondence with me. This improved me in composition. I had met with a collection of letters by the wits of Queen Anne's reign, and I pored over them most devoutly; I kept copies of any of my own letters that pleased me; and a comparison between them and the composition of most of my correspondents flattered my vanity. I carried this whim so far, that though I had not three farthings' worth of business in the world, yet almost every post brought me as many letters as if I had been a broad plodding son of day-book and ledger.

"My life flowed on much in the same course till my twenty-third year. *Vive l'amour, et vive la bagatelle*, were my sole principles of action. The addition of two more authors to my library gave me great pleasure; *Sterne* and *M'Kenzie* —*Tristram Shandy* and *The Man of Feeling*— were my bosom favourites. Poesy was still a darling walk for my mind; but it was only indulged in according to the humour of the hour. I had usually half a dozen or more pieces on hand; I took up one or other, as it suited the momentary

momentary tone of the mind, and dismissed the work as it bordered on fatigue. My passions, when once lighted up, raged like so many devils, till they got vent in rhyme; and then the conning over my verses, like a spell, soothed all into quiet! None of the rhymes of those days are in print, except *Winter, a Dirge,** the eldest of my printed pieces; *the Death of Poor Maillie,*† *John Barleycorn,*‡ and songs, first, second, and third.§ Song second was the ebullition of that passion which ended the forementioned school-business.

" My twenty-third year was to me an important æra. Partly through whim, and partly that I wished to set about doing something in life, I joined a flax-dresser in a neighbouring town (Irwin) to learn his trade. This was an unlucky affair. My * * *; and, to finish the whole, as we were giving a welcome carousal to the new year, the shop took fire, and burnt to ashes; and I was left, like a true poet, not worth a sixpence.

" I was obliged to give up this scheme: the clouds of misfortune were gathering thick round

* *See vol.* iii. *p.* 171.
† *See vol.* iii. *p.* 77.
‡ *See vol.* iii. *p.* 261.
§ *See vol.* iii. *pp.* 271. 274. 277.

round my father's head; and what was worst of all, he was visibly far gone in a consumption; and, to crown my distresses, a *belle fille* whom I adored, and who had pledged her soul to meet me in the field of matrimony, jilted me, with peculiar circumstances of mortification. The finishing evil that brought up the rear of this infernal file, was, my constitutional melancholy, being increased to such a degree, that for three months I was in a state of mind scarcely to be envied by the hopeless wretches who have got their mittimus—*Depart from me ye accursed!*

"From this adventure I learned something of a town life; but the principal thing which gave my mind a turn, was a friendship I formed with a young fellow, a very noble character, but a hapless son of misfortune. He was the son of a simple mechanic; but a great man in the neighbourhood taking him under his patronage, gave him a genteel education, with a view of bettering his situation in life. The patron dying just as he was ready to launch out into the world, the poor fellow in despair went to sea; where, after a variety of good and ill fortune, a little before I was acquainted with him, he had been set on shore by an American privateer, on the wild coast of Connaught, stripped of every thing. I cannot quit this poor fellow's

fellow's story without adding, that he is at this time master of a large West-Indiaman belonging to the Thames.

" His mind was fraught with independence, magnanimity, and every manly virtue. I loved and admired him to a degree of enthusiasm, and of course strove to imitate him. In some measure I succeeded; I had pride before, but he taught it to flow in proper channels. His knowledge of the world was vastly superior to mine, and I was all attention to learn. He was the only man I ever saw who was a greater fool than myself, where woman was the presiding star; but he spoke of illicit love with the levity of a sailor, which hitherto I had regarded with horror. Here his friendship did me a mischief; and the consequence was, that soon after I resumed the plough, I wrote the *Poet's Welcome*.* My reading only increased, while in this town, by two stray volumes of *Pamela*, and one of *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, which gave me some idea of novels. Rhyme, except some religious pieces that are in print, I had given up; but meeting with *Fergusson's Scottish Poems*, I strung anew my wildly-sounding lyre with emulating vigour. When my father died, his all went among the hell-hounds that prowl in

* *Rob the Rhymer's Welcome to his Bastard Child.*

the kennel of justice; but we made a shift to collect a little money in the family amongst us, with which, to keep us together, my brother and I took a neighbouring farm. My brother wanted my hair-brained imagination, as well as my social and amorous madness: but, in good sense, and every sober qualification, he was far my superior.

" I entered on this farm with a full resolution, *Come, go to, I will be wise!* I read farming books; I calculated crops; I attended markets; and, in short, in spite of *the devil, and the world, and the flesh,* I believe I should have been a wise man; but the first year, from unfortunately buying bad seed, the second, from a late harvest, we lost half our crops. This overset all my wisdom, and I returned, *like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire.**

" I now began to be known in the neighbourhood as a maker of rhymes. The first of my poetic offspring that saw the light, was a burlesque lamentation on a quarrel between two reverend Calvinists, both of them *dramatis personæ* in my *Holy Fair.* I had a notion myself, that the piece had some merit; but to prevent the

* *See Appendix, No.* II. *Note* B.

the worst, I gave a copy of it to a friend who was very fond of such things, and told him that I could not guess who was the author of it, but that I thought it pretty clever. With a certain description of the clergy, as well as laity, it met with a roar of applause. *Holy Willie's Prayer* next made its appearance, and alarmed the kirk-session so much, that they held several meetings to look over their spiritual artillery, if haply any of it might be pointed against profane rhymers. Unluckily for me, my wanderings led me on another side, within point-blank shot of their heaviest metal. This is the unfortunate story that gave rise to my printed poem, *The Lament.* This was a most melancholy affair, which I cannot yet bear to reflect on, and had very nearly given me one or two of the principal qualifications for a place among those who have lost the chart, and mistaken the reckoning of Rationality.* I gave up my part of the farm to my brother; in truth it was only nominally mine; and made what little preparation was in my power for Jamaica. But, before leaving my native country for ever, I resolved to publish my poems. I weighed my productions as impartially as was in my power: I thought they had merit; and it was a delicious idea that I should be called a clever fellow, even

* An explanation of this will be found hereafter.

even though it should never reach my ears —a poor negro-driver,—or perhaps a victim to that inhospitable clime, and gone to the world of spirits! I can truly say, that *pauvre inconnu* as I then was, I had pretty nearly as high an idea of myself and of my works as I have at this moment, when the public has decided in their favour. It ever was my opinion, that the mistakes and blunders, both in a rational and religious point of view, of which we see thousands daily guilty, are owing to their ignorance of themselves.—To know myself, had been all along my constant study. I weighed myself alone; I balanced myself with others; I watched every means of information, to see how much ground I occupied as a man and as a poet: I studied assiduously Nature's design in my formation—where the lights and shades in my character were intended. I was pretty confident my poems would meet with some applause: but, at the worst, the roar of the Atlantic would deafen the voice of censure, and the novelty of West-Indian scenes make me forget neglect. I threw off six hundred copies, of which I had got subscriptions for about three hundred and fifty.—My vanity was highly gratified by the reception I met with from the public; and besides I pocketed, all expenses deducted, nearly twenty pounds. This sum came very seasonably, as I was thinking of indenting myself, for want

want of money to procure my passage. As soon as I was master of nine guineas, the price of wafting me to the torrid zone, I took a steerage-passage in the first ship that was to sail from the Clyde; for

"Hungry ruin had me in the wind."

"I had been for some days sculking from covert to covert, under all the terrors of a jail; as some ill-advised people had uncoupled the merciless pack of the law at my heels. I had taken the last farewell of my few friends; my chest was on the road to Greenock; I had composed the last song I should ever measure in Caledonia. *The gloomy night is gathering fast,** when a letter from Dr. Blacklock, to a friend of mine, overthrew all my schemes, by opening new prospects to my poetic ambition.† The doctor belonged to a set of critics, for whose applause I had not dared to hope. His opinion that I would meet with encouragement in Edinburgh for a second edition, fired me so much, that away I posted for that city, without a single acquaintance, or a single letter of introduction. The baneful star that had so long shed its blasting influence in my zenith for once made a revolution to the nadir; and a kind

* *See vol.* iii. *p.* 287. † *See vol.* ii. *p.* 29.

kind Providence placed me under the patronage of one of the noblest of men, the Earl of Glencairn. *Oublie moi, Grand Dieu, si jamais je l'oublie!*

" I need relate no farther. At Edinburgh I was in a new world; I mingled among many classes of men, but all of them new to me, and I was all attention to *catch* the characters and *the manners living as they rise.* Whether I have profited, time will shew.

* * * * * * * * *

" My most respectful compliments to Miss W. Her very elegant and friendly letter I cannot answer at present, as my presence is requisite in Edinburgh, and I set out to-morrow."*

At the period of our poet's death, his brother, Gilbert Burns, was ignorant that he had himself

* There are various copies of this letter, in the author's hand-writing; and one of these, evidently corrected, is in the book in which he had copied several of his letters. This has been used for the press, with some omissions, and one slight alteration suggested by Gilbert Burns.

himself written the foregoing narrative of his life while in Ayrshire; and having been applied to by Mrs. Dunlop for some memoirs of his brother, he complied with her request in a letter, from which the following narrative is chiefly extracted. When Gilbert Burns afterwards saw the letter of our poet to Dr. Moore, he made some annotations upon it, which shall be noticed as we proceed.

Robert Burns was born on the 25th day of January, 1759, in a small house about two miles from the town of Ayr, and within a few hundred yards of Alloway Church, which his poem of *Tam o' Shanter* has rendered immortal.* The name, which the poet and his brother modernized into Burns, was originally Burnes or Burness. Their father, William Burnes, was the son of a farmer in Kincardineshire, and had received the education common in Scotland to persons in his condition of life; he could read and write, and had some knowledge of arithmetic. His family

* This house is on the right-hand side of the road from Ayr to Maybole, which forms a part of the road from Glasgow to Port-Patrick. When the poet's father afterwards removed to Tarbolton parish, he sold his leasehold right in this house, and a few acres of land adjoining, to the corporation of shoemakers in Ayr. It is now a country ale-house.

family having fallen into reduced circumstances, he was compelled to leave his home in his nineteenth year, and turned his steps towards the south in quest of a livelihood. The same necessity attended his elder brother Robert. " I have often heard my father," says Gilbert Burns, in his letter to Mrs. Dunlop, " describe the anguish of mind he felt when they parted on the top of a hill on the confines of their native place, each going off his several way in search of new adventures, and scarcely knowing whither he went. My father undertook to act as a gardener, and shaped his course to Edinburgh, where he wrought hard when he could get work, passing through a variety of difficulties. Still, however, he endeavoured to spare something for the support of his aged parent; and I recollect hearing him mention his having sent a banknote for this purpose, when money of that kind was so scarce in Kincardineshire, that they scarcely knew how to employ it when it arrived." From Edinburgh, William Burnes passed westward into the county of Ayr, where he engaged himself as a gardener to the laird of Fairly, with whom he lived two years ; then changing his service for that of Crawford of Doonside. At length, being desirous of settling in life, he took a perpetual lease of seven acres of land from Dr. Campbell, physician in Ayr, with the view of commencing nurseryman and public gardener ; and,

and, having built a house upon it with his own hands, married in December 1757, Agnes Brown, the mother of our poet, who still survives. The first fruit of this marriage was Robert, the subject of these memoirs, born on the 25th of January, 1759, as has already been mentioned. Before William Burnes had made much progress in preparing his nursery, he was withdrawn from that undertaking by Mr. Ferguson, who purchased the estate of Doonholm, in the immediate neighbourhood, and engaged him as his gardener and overseer; and this was his situation when our poet was born. Though in the service of Mr. Ferguson, he lived in his own house, his wife managing her family and her little dairy, which consisted sometimes of two, sometimes of three milch cows; and this state of unambitious content continued till the year 1766. His son Robert was sent by him in his sixth year to a school at Alloway Miln, about a mile distant, taught by a person of the name of Campbell; but this teacher being in a few months appointed master of the workhouse at Ayr, William Burnes, in conjunction with some other heads of families, engaged John Murdoch in his stead. The education of our poet, and of his brother Gilbert, was in common; and of their proficiency under Mr. Murdoch we have the following account: "With him we learnt to read

read English tolerably well,* and to write a little. He taught us, too, the English grammar. I was too young to profit much from his lessons in grammar; but Robert made some proficiency in it—a circumstance of considerable weight in the unfolding of his genius and character; as he soon became remarkable for the fluency and correctness of his expression, and read the few books that came in his way with much pleasure and improvement; for even then he was a reader when he could get a book. Murdoch, whose library at that time had no great variety in it, lent him *The Life of Hannibal*, which was the first book he read (the school-books excepted), and almost the only one he had an opportunity of reading while he was at school; for *The Life of Wallace*, which he classes with it in one of his letters to you, he did not see for some years afterwards, when he borrowed it from the blacksmith who shod our horses.

It appears that William Burnes approved himself greatly in the service of Mr. Ferguson, by his intelligence, industry, and integrity. In consequence of this, with a view of promoting his interest, Mr. Ferguson leased him a farm, of which we have the following account:

"The

* Letter from Gilbert Burns to Mrs. Dunlop.

"The farm was upwards of seventy acres* (between eighty and ninety, English statute measure), the rent of which was to be forty pounds annually for the first six years, and afterwards forty-five pounds. My father endeavoured to sell his leasehold property, for the purpose of stocking this farm, but at that time was unable, and Mr. Ferguson lent him a hundred pounds for that purpose. He removed to his new situation at Whitsuntide, 1766. It was, I think, not above two years after this, that Murdoch, our tutor and friend, left this part of the country; and there being no school near us, and our little services being useful on the farm, my father undertook to teach us arithmetic in the winter evenings, by candle-light; and in this way my two eldest sisters got all the education they received. I remember a circumstance that happened at this time, which, though trifling in itself, is fresh in my memory, and may serve to illustrate the early character of my brother. Murdoch came to spend a night with us, and to take his leave when he was about to go into Carrick. He brought us, as a present and memorial of him, a small compendium of English Grammar, and the tragedy of *Titus Andronicus;* and by way of passing the evening, he began to read

* Letter of Gilbert Burns to Mrs. Dunlop. The name of this farm is Mount Oliphant, in Ayr parish.

read the play aloud. We were all attention for some time, till presently the whole party was dissolved in tears. A female in the play (I have but a confused remembrance of it) had her hands chopt off, and her tongue cut out, and then was insultingly desired to call for water to wash her hands. At this, in an agony of distress, we with one voice desired he would read no more. My father observed, that if we would not hear it out, it would be needless to leave the play with us. Robert replied, that if it was left he would burn it. My father was going to chide him for this ungrateful return to his tutor's kindness; but Murdoch interfered, declaring that he liked to see so much sensibility; and he left *The School for Love*, a comedy, (translated I think from the French,) in its place."*

"Nothing," continues Gilbert Burns, "could be more retired than our general manner of living at Mount Oliphant; we rarely saw any body but the members of our own family. There were no

* It is to be remembered that the poet was only nine years of age, and the relater of this incident under eight, at the time it happened. The effect was very natural in children of sensibility at their age. At a more mature period of the judgment, such absurd representations are calculated rather to produce disgust or laughter, than

no boys of our own age, or near it, in the neighbourhood. Indeed the greatest part of the land in the vicinity was at that time possessed by shopkeepers, and people of that stamp, who had retired from business, or who kept their farm in the country, at the same time that they followed business in town. My father was for some time almost the only companion we had. He conversed familiarly on all subjects with us, as if we had been men; and was at great pains, while we accompanied him in the labours of the farm, to lead the conversation to such subjects as might tend to increase our knowledge, or confirm us in virtuous habits. He borrowed *Salmon's Geographical Grammar* for us, and endeavoured to make

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than tears. The scene to which Gilbert Burns alludes, opens thus:

Titus Andronicus, Act II. Scene 5.

Enter Demetrius *and* Chiron, *with* Lavinia *ravished, her hands cut off, and her tongue cut out.*

Why is this silly play still printed as Shakespear's against the opinion of all the best critics? The bard of Avon was guilty of many extravagancies, but he always performed what he intended to perform. That he ever excited in a British mind (for the French critics must be set aside) disgust or ridicule, where he meant to have awakened pity or horror, is what will not be imputed to that master of the passions. E.

make us acquainted with the situation and history of the different countries in the world; while, from a book-society in Ayr, he procured for us the reading of *Derham's Physico and Astro-Theology*, and *Ray's Wisdom of God in the Creation*, to give us some idea of astronomy and natural history. Robert read all these books with an avidity and industry scarcely to be equalled. My father had been a subscriber to *Stackhouse's History of the Bible*, then lately published by James Meuros in Kilmarnock: from this Robert collected a competent knowledge of ancient history; for no book was so voluminous as to slacken his industry, or so antiquated as to damp his researches. A brother of my mother, who had lived with us some time, and had learnt some arithmetic by our winter evening's candle, went into a bookseller's shop in Ayr, to purchase *The Ready Reckoner*, or *Tradesman's sure Guide*, and a book to teach him to write letters. Luckily, in place of *The Complete Letter-Writer*, he got by mistake a small collection of letters by the most eminent writers, with a few sensible directions for attaining an easy epistolary style. This book was to Robert of the greatest consequence. It inspired him with a strong desire to excel in letter-writing, while it furnished him with models by some of the first writers in our language.

"My

"My brother was about thirteen or fourteen, when my father, regretting that we wrote so ill, sent us, week about, during a summer quarter, to the parish school of Dalrymple, which, though between two and three miles distant, was the nearest to us, that we might have an opportunity of remedying this defect. About this time a bookish acquaintance of my father's procured us a reading of two volumes of Richardson's *Pamela*, which was the first novel we read, and the only part of Richardson's works my brother was acquainted with till towards the period of his commencing author. Till that time too he remained unacquainted with Fielding, with Smollet, (two volumes of *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, and two volumes of *Peregrine Pickle* excepted,) with Hume, with Robertson, and almost all our authors of eminence of the later times. I recollect indeed my father borrowed a volume of English history from Mr. Hamilton of Bourtree-hill's gardener. It treated of the reign of James the First, and his unfortunate son, Charles, but I do not know who was the author; all that I remember of it is something of Charles's conversation with his children. About this time Murdoch, our former teacher, after having been in different places in the country, and having taught a school some time in Dumfries, came to be the established teacher of the English language in Ayr, a circumstance of considerable

consequence to us. The remembrance of my father's former friendship, and his attachment to my brother, made him do every thing in his power for our improvement. He sent us Pope's works, and some other poetry, the first that we had an opportunity of reading, excepting what is contained in *The English Collection*, and in the volume of *The Edinburgh Magazine* for 1772; excepting also *those excellent new songs* that are hawked about the country in baskets, or exposed on stalls in the streets.

"The summer after we had been at Dalrymple school, my father sent Robert to Ayr, to revise his English grammar, with his former teacher. He had been there only one week, when he was obliged to return, to assist at the harvest. When the harvest was over, he went back to school, where he remained two weeks; and this completes the account of his school education, excepting one summer quarter, some time afterwards, that he attended the parish school of Kirk-Oswald, (where he lived with a brother of my mother's) to learn surveying.

"During the two last weeks that he was with Murdoch, he himself was engaged in learning French, and he communicated the instructions he received to my brother, who, when he returned, brought home with him a French dictionary and

and grammar, and the *Adventures of Telemachus* in the original. In a little while, by the assistance of these books, he had acquired such a knowledge of the language, as to read and understand any French author in prose. This was considered as a sort of prodigy, and, through the medium of Murdoch, procured him the acquaintance of several lads in Ayr, who were at that time gabbling French, and the notice of some families, particularly that of Dr. Malcolm, where a knowledge of French was a recommendation.

" Observing the facility with which he had acquired the French language, Mr. Robinson, the established writing-master in Ayr, and Mr. Murdoch's particular friend, having himself acquired a considerable knowledge of the Latin language by his own industry, without ever having learnt it at school, advised Robert to make the same attempt, promising him every assistance in his power. Agreeably to this advice, he purchased *The Rudiments of the Latin Tongue*, but finding this study dry and uninteresting, it was quickly laid aside. He frequently returned to his *Rudiments* on any little chagrin or disappointment, particularly in his love affairs; but the Latin seldom predominated more than a day or two at a time, or a week at most. Observing himself the ridicule that would attach to this

sort of conduct if it were known, he made two or three humorous stanzas on the subject, which I cannot now recollect, but they all ended,

'So I'll to my Latin again.'

"Thus you see Mr. Murdoch was a principal means of my brother's improvement. Worthy man! though foreign to my present purpose, I cannot take leave of him without tracing his future history. He continued for some years a respected and useful teacher at Ayr, till one evening that he had been overtaken in liquor, he happened to speak somewhat disrespectfully of Dr. Dalrymple, the parish minister, who had not paid him that attention to which he thought himself entitled. In Ayr he might as well have spoken blasphemy. He found it proper to give up his appointment. He went to London, where he still lives, a private teacher of French. He has been a considerable time married, and keeps a shop of stationery wares.

"The father of Dr. Paterson, now physician at Ayr, was, I believe, a native of Aberdeenshire, and was one of the established teachers in Ayr when my father settled in the neighbourhood. He early recognised my father as a fellow native of the north of Scotland, and a certain degree of intimacy subsisted between them during Mr. Paterson's life. After his death, his

his widow, who is a very genteel woman, and of great worth, delighted in doing what she thought her husband would have wished to have done, and assiduously kept up her attentions to all his acquaintance. She kept alive the intimacy with our family, by frequently inviting my father and mother to her house on Sundays, when she met them at church.

"When she came to know my brother's passion for books, she kindly offered us the use of her husband's library, and from her we got the *Spectator*, *Pope's Translation of Homer*, and several other books that were of use to us. Mount Oliphant, the farm my father possessed in the parish of Ayr, is almost the very poorest soil I know of in a state of cultivation. A stronger proof of this I cannot give, than that, notwithstanding the extraordinary rise in the value of lands in Scotland, it was, after a considerable sum laid out in improving it by the proprietor, let a few years ago five pounds per annum lower than the rent paid for it by my father thirty years ago. My father, in consequence of this, soon came into difficulties, which were increased by the loss of several of his cattle by accidents and disease.—To the buffettings of misfortune, we could only oppose hard labour and the most rigid economy. We lived very sparingly. For several years butcher's meat was a stranger

stranger in the house, while all the members of the family exerted themselves to the utmost of their strength, and rather beyond it, in the labours of the farm. My brother, at the age of thirteen, assisted in threshing the crop of corn, and at fifteen was the principal labourer on the farm, for we had no hired servant, male or female. The anguish of mind we felt at our tender years, under these straits and difficulties, was very great. To think of our father growing old (for he was now above fifty) broken down with the long continued fatigues of his life, with a wife and five other children, and in a declining state of circumstances, these reflections produced in my brother's mind and mine sensations of the deepest distress. I doubt not but the hard labour and sorrow of this period of his life, was in a great measure the cause of that depression of spirits with which Robert was so often afflicted through his whole life afterwards. At this time he was almost constantly afflicted in the evenings with a dull head-ach, which, at a future period of his life, was exchanged for a palpitation of the heart, and a threatening of fainting and suffocation in his bed, in the night-time.

" By a stipulation in my father's lease, he had a right to throw it up, if he thought proper, at the end of every sixth year. He attempted to fix himself in a better farm at the end of the first six years,

years, but failing in that attempt, he continued where he was for six years more. He then took the farm of Lochlea, of 130 acres, at the rent of twenty shillings an acre, in the parish of Tarbolton, of Mr. ——— ———, then a merchant in Ayr, and now (1797) a merchant in Liverpool. He removed to this farm at Whit-Sunday, 1777, and possessed it only seven years. No writing had ever been made out of the conditions of the lease; a misunderstanding took place respecting them; the subjects in dispute were submitted to arbitration, and the decision involved my father's affairs in ruin. He lived to know of this decision, but not to see any execution in consequence of it. He died on the 13th of February, 1784.

" The seven years we lived in Tarbolton parish (extending from the seventeenth to the twenty-fourth of my brother's age), were not marked by much literary improvement; but, during this time, the foundation was laid of certain habits in my brother's character, which afterwards became but too prominent, and which malice and envy have taken delight to enlarge on. Though when young he was bashful and awkward in his intercourse with women, yet when he approached manhood, his attachment to their society became very strong, and he was constantly the victim of some fair enslaver. The

The symptoms of his passion were often such as nearly to equal those of the celebrated Sappho. I never indeed knew that he *fainted, sunk, and died away;* but the agitations of his mind and body exceeded any thing of the kind I ever knew in real life. He had always a particular jealousy of people who were richer than himself, or who had more consequence in life. His love, therefore, rarely settled on persons of this description. When he selected any one out of the sovereignty of his good pleasure to whom he should pay his particular attention, she was instantly invested with a sufficient stock of charms, out of the plentiful stores of his own imagination; and there was often a great dissimilitude between his fair captivator, as she appeared to others, and as she seemed when invested with the attributes he gave her. One generally reigned paramount in his affections; but as Yorick's affections flowed out toward Madame de L— at the remise door, while the eternal vows of Eliza were upon him, so Robert was frequently encountering other attractions, which formed so many under-plots in the drama of his love. As these connexions were governed by the strictest rules of virtue and modesty (from which he never deviated till he reached his 23d year), he became anxious to be in a situation to marry. This was not likely to be soon the case while he remained a farmer, as the

the stocking of a farm required a sum of money he had no probability of being master of for a great while. He began, therefore, to think of trying some other line of life. He and I had for several years taken land of my father for the purpose of raising flax on our own account. In the course of selling it, Robert began to think of turning flax-dresser, both as being suitable to his grand view of settling in life, and as subservient to the flax raising. He accordingly wrought at the business of a flax-dresser in Irvine for six months, but abandoned it at that period, as neither agreeing with his health nor inclination. In Irvine he had contracted some acquaintance of a freer manner of thinking and living than he had been used to, whose society prepared him for overleaping the bounds of rigid virtue which had hitherto restrained him. Towards the end of the period under review (in his 24th year), and soon after his father's death, he was furnished with the subject of his epistle to John Rankin. During this period also he became a freemason, which was his first introduction to the life of a boon companion. Yet, notwithstanding these circumstances, and the praise he has bestowed on Scotch drink (which seems to have misled his historians), I do not recollect, during these seven years, nor till towards the end of his commencing author (when his growing celebrity occasioned

occasioned his being often in company), to have ever seen him intoxicated; nor was he at all given to drinking. A stronger proof of the general sobriety of his conduct need not be required than what I am about to give. During the whole of the time we lived in the farm of Lochlea with my father, he allowed my brother and me such wages for our labour as he gave to other labourers, as a part of which, every article of our clothing manufactured in the family was regularly accounted for. When my father's affairs drew near a crisis, Robert and I took the farm of Mossgiel, consisting of 118 acres, at the rent of 90l. per annum (the farm on which I live at present), from Mr. Gavin Hamilton, as an asylum for the family in case of the worst. It was stocked by the property and individual savings of the whole family, and was a joint concern among us. Every member of the family was allowed ordinary wages for the labour he performed on the farm. My brother's allowance and mine was seven pounds per annum each. And during the whole time this family-concern lasted, which was four years, as well as during the preceding period at Lochlea, his expenses never in any one year exceeded his slender income. As I was intrusted with the keeping of the family accounts, it is not possible that there can be any fallacy in this statement in my brother's favour. His temperance

perance and frugality were every thing that could be wished.

"The farm of Mossgiel lies very high, and mostly on a cold wet bottom. The first four years that we were on the farm were very frosty, and the spring was very late. Our crops in consequence were very unprofitable; and, notwithstanding our utmost diligence and economy, we found ourselves obliged to give up our bargain, with the loss of a considerable part of our original stock. It was during these four years that Robert formed his connexion with Jean Armour, afterwards Mrs. Burns. This connexion *could no longer be concealed*, about the time we came to a final determination to quit the farm. Robert durst not engage with a family in his poor unsettled state, but was anxious to shield his partner by every means in his power from the consequences of their imprudence. It was agreed therefore between them, that they should make a legal acknowledgment of an irregular and private marriage; that he should go to Jamaica to *push his fortune;* and that she should remain with her father till it might please Providence to put the means of supporting a family in his power.

"Mrs. Burns was a great favourite of her father's. The intimation of a marriage was the first

first suggestion he received of her real situation. He was in the greatest distress, and fainted away. The marriage did not appear to him to make the matter better. A husband in Jamaica appeared to him and his wife little better than none, and an effectual bar to any other prospects of a settlement in life that their daughter might have. They therefore expressed a wish to her, that the written papers which respected the marriage should be cancelled, and thus the marriage rendered void. In her melancholy state she felt the deepest remorse at having brought such heavy affliction on parents that loved her so tenderly, and submitted to their entreaties. Their wish was mentioned to Robert. He felt the deepest anguish of mind. He offered to stay at home and provide for his wife and family in the best manner that his daily labours could provide for them; that being the only means in his power. Even this offer they did not approve of; for humble as Miss Armour's station was, and great though her imprudence had been, she still in the eyes of her partial parents, might look to a better connexion than that with my friendless and unhappy brother, at that time without house or biding-place. Robert at length consented to their wishes; but his feelings on this occasion were of the most distracting nature; and the impression of sorrow was not effaced, till by a regular

regular marriage they were indissolubly united. In the state of mind which this separation produced, he wished to leave the country as soon as possible, and agreed with Dr. Douglas to go out to Jamaica as an assistant overseer, or, as I believe it is called, a book-keeper, on his estate. As he had not sufficient money to pay his passage, and the vessel in which Dr. Douglas was to procure a passage for him was not expected to sail for some time, Mr. Hamilton advised him to publish his poems in the mean time by subscription, as a likely way of getting a little money to provide him more liberally in necessaries for Jamaica. Agreeably to this advice, subscription-bills were printed immediately, and the printing was commenced at Kilmarnock, his preparations going on at the same time for his voyage. The reception, however, which his poems met with in the world, and the friends they procured him, made him change his resolution of going to Jamaica, and he was advised to go to Edinburgh to publish a second edition. On his return, in happier circumstances, he renewed his connexion with Mrs. Burns, and rendered it permanent by an union for life.

" Thus, Madam, have I endeavoured to give you a simple narrative of the leading circumstances in my brother's early life. The remaining part he spent in Edinburgh, or in Dumfries-

shire,

shire, and its incidents are as well known to you as to me. His genius having procured him your patronage and friendship, this gave rise to the correspondence between you, in which, I believe, his sentiments were delivered with the most respectful, but most unreserved confidence, and which only terminated with the last days of his life."

This narrative of Gilbert Burns may serve as a commentary on the preceding sketch of our poet's life by himself. It will be seen that the distraction of mind which he mentions *(p. 53)*, arose from the distress and sorrow in which he had involved his future wife.—The whole circumstances attending this connexion are certainly of a very singular nature.*

The reader will perceive, from the foregoing narrative, how much the children of William Burnes were indebted to their father, who was certainly a man of uncommon talents; though it

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* In page 55, the Poet mentions his—" skulking from covert to covert, under the terror of a jail."—The " pack of the law" were " uncoupled at his heels," to oblige him to find security for the maintenance of his twin-children, whom he was not permitted to legitimate by a marriage with their mother.

it does not appear that he possessed any portion of that vivid imagination for which the subject of these memoirs was distinguished. In page 44, it is observed by our poet, that his father had an unaccountable antipathy to dancing-schools, and that his attending one of these brought on him his displeasure, and even dislike. On this observation Gilbert has made the following remark, which seems entitled to implicit credit:— "I wonder how Robert could attribute to our father that lasting resentment of his going to a dancing-school against his will, of which he was incapable. I believe the truth was, that he, about this time began to see the dangerous impetuosity of my brother's passions, as well as his not being amenable to counsel, which often irritated my father; and which he would naturally think a dancing-school was not likely to correct. But he was proud of Robert's genius, which he bestowed more expense in cultivating than on the rest of the family, in the instances of sending him to Ayr and Kirk-Oswald schools; and he was greatly delighted with his warmth of heart, and his conversational powers. He had indeed that dislike of dancing-schools which Robert mentions; but so far overcame it during Robert's first month of attendance, that he allowed all the rest of the family that were fit for it to accompany him during the second month. Robert excelled in dancing,

dancing, and was for some time distractedly fond of it."

In the original letter to Dr. Moore, our poet described his ancestors as " renting lands of the noble Keiths of Marischal, and as having had the honour of sharing their fate." " I do not," continues he, " use the word *honour* with any reference to political principles; *loyal* and *disloyal*, I take to be merely relative terms, in that ancient and formidable court, known in this country by the name of Club-law, where the right is always with the strongest. But those who dare welcome ruin, and shake hands with infamy, for what they sincerely believe to be the cause of their God, or their king, are, as Mark Antony says in Shakespeare, of Brutus and Cassius, *honourable men*. I mention this circumstance, because it threw my father on the world at large."

This paragraph has been omitted in printing the letter, at the desire of Gilbert Burns; and it would have been unnecessary to have noticed it on the present occasion, had not several manuscript copies of that letter been in circulation. " I do not know," observes Gilbert Burns, " how my brother could be misled in the account he has given of the Jacobitism of his ancestors.—I believe the Earl Marischal forfeited his

his title and estate in 1715, before my father was born; and among a collection of parish-certificates in his possession, I have read one, stating that the bearer had no concern in the *late wicked rebellion.*" On the information of one who knew William Burnes soon after he arrived in the county of Ayr, it may be mentioned, that a report did prevail, that he had taken the field with the young Chevalier; a report which the certificate mentioned by his son was, perhaps, intended to counteract. Strangers from the North, settling in the low country of Scotland, were in those days liable to suspicions, of having been, in the familiar phrase of the country, "Out in the forty-five," (1745), especially when they had any stateliness or reserve about them, as was the case with William Burnes. It may easily be conceived, that our poet would cherish the belief of his father's having been engaged in the daring enterprise of Prince Charles Edward. The generous attachment, the heroic valour, and the final misfortunes of the adherents of the house of Stuart, touched with sympathy his youthful and ardent mind, and influenced his original political opinions.*

The

* There is another observation of Gilbert Burns on his brother's narrative, in which some persons will be interested. It refers to pages 39 and 40, where the poet speaks of his youthful friends. "My brother," says

The father of our poet is described by one who knew him towards the latter end of his life, as above the common stature, thin, and bent with labour. His countenance was serious and expressive, and the scanty locks on his head were

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Gilbert Burns, " seems to set off his early companions in too consequential a manner. The principal acquaintance we had in Ayr, while boys, were four sons of Mr. Andrew M'Culloch, a distant relation of my mother's, who kept a tea-shop, and had made a little money in the contraband trade, very common at that time. He died while the boys were young, and my father was nominated one of the tutors. The two eldest were bred shopkeepers, the third a surgeon, and the youngest, the only surviving one, was bred in a counting-house in Glasgow, where he is now a respectable merchant. I believe all these boys went to the West Indies. Then there were two sons of Dr. Malcolm, whom I have mentioned in my letter to Mrs. Dunlop. The eldest, a very worthy young man, went to the East Indies, where he had a commission in the army; he is the person whose heart my brother says the *Munny Begum scenes could not corrupt*. The other, by the interest of Lady Wallace, got an ensigncy in a regiment raised by the Duke of Hamilton, during the American war. I believe neither of them are now (1797) alive. We also knew the present Dr. Paterson of Ayr, and a younger brother of his now in Jamaica, who were much younger than us. I had almost forgot to mention Dr. Charles of Ayr, who was a little older than my brother, and with whom we had a longer and closer intimacy than with any of the others, which did not, however, continue in after life."

were grey. He was of a religious turn of mind, and, as is usual among the Scottish peasantry, a good deal conversant in speculative theology. There is in Gilbert's hands a little manual of religious belief, in the form of a dialogue between a father and his son, composed by him for the use of his children, in which the benevolence of his heart seems to have led him to soften the rigid Calvinism of the Scottish church, into something approaching to Arminianism. He was a devout man, and in the practice of calling his family together to join in prayer. It is known that the following exquisite picture, in the *Cotter's Saturday Night*, represents William Burnes and his family at their evening devotions.

The cheerful supper done, with serious face,
They, round the ingle,* form a circle wide;
The sire turns o'er, with patriarchal grace,
The big *hall*-Bible, once his father's pride:
His bonnet rev'rently is laid aside,
His lyart haffets† wearing thin and bare;
Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
He wales‡ a portion with judicious care;
And "*Let us worship God!*" he says with solemn air.

They chant their artless notes in simple guise;
They tune their hearts, by far the noblest aim:
Perhaps *Dundee*'s§ wild warbling measures rise,
Or plaintive *Martyrs*§ worthy of the name;

* Fire. † Grey temples. ‡ Chooses.

§ Names of tunes in Scottish psalmody. The tunes mentioned in this poem are the three which were used by William Burnes, who had no greater variety.

Or noble *Elgin* beets* the heavenly flame,
The sweetest far of Scotia's holy lays;
Compar'd with these, Italian trills are tame;
The tickled ears no heart-felt raptures raise;
No unison have they with our Creator's praise.

The priest-like father reads the sacred page,†
How *Abram* was the *friend* of God on high;
Or, Moses bade eternal warfare wage
With Amalek's ungracious progeny;
Or how the *royal bard* did groaning lie,
Beneath the stroke of Heaven's avenging ire;
Or, Job's pathetic plaint, and wailing cry;
Or, rapt Isaiah's wild seraphic fire;
Or other holy seers that tune the sacred lyre.

Perhaps the Christian volume is the theme,
How guiltless blood for guilty man was shed;
How *he*, who bore in heaven the second name,
Had not on earth whereon to lay his head;
How his first followers and servants sped;
The precepts sage, they wrote to many a land;
How *he*, who lone in *Patmos* banished,
Saw in the sun a mighty angel stand;
And heard great Babylon's doom pronounced, by Heaven's command!

Then kneeling down, to Heaven's eternal King,
The *saint*, the *father*, and the *husband*, prays;
Hope springs exulting on triumphant wing,
That *thus* they all shall meet in future days;

There

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* Adds fuel to.

† The course of family devotion among the Scots is, first to sing a psalm, then to read a portion of scripture, and lastly to kneel down in prayer.

There ever bask in uncreated rays,
No more to sigh, or shed the bitter tear,
Together hymning their Creator's praise,
In such society, yet still more dear;
While circling time moves round in an eternal sphere.

* * * * * * * * *

Then homeward all take off their several way;
The youngling cottagers retire to rest:
The parent pair their *secret homage* pay,
And offer up to Heaven the warm request,
That *he* who stills the raven's clam'rous nest,
And decks the lily fair in flowery pride,
Would, in the way his wisdom sees the best,
For them and for their little ones provide;
But chiefly, in their hearts, with *grace divine* preside!

Of a family so interesting as that which inhabited the cottage of William Burnes, and particularly of the father of the family, the reader will perhaps be willing to listen to some farther account. What follows is given by one already mentioned with so much honour, in the narrative of Gilbert Burns, Mr. Murdoch, the preceptor of our poet, who, in a letter to Joseph Cooper Walker, Esq. of Dublin, author of the *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards*, and of the *Historical Memoir of the Italian Tragedy*, thus expresses himself:

" Sir,

" SIR,

" I was lately favoured with a letter from our worthy friend, the Rev. Wm. Adair, in which he requested me to communicate to you whatever particulars I could recollect concerning Robert Burns, the Ayrshire poet. My business being at present multifarious and harassing, my attention is consequently so much divided, and I am so little in the habit of expressing my thoughts on paper, that at this distance of time I can give but a very imperfect sketch of the early part of the life of that extraordinary genius, with which alone I am acquainted.

" William Burnes, the father of the poet, was born in the shire of Kincardine, and bred a gardener. He had been settled in Ayrshire ten or twelve years before I knew him, and had been in the service of Mr. Crawford of Doonside. He was afterwards employed as a gardener and overseer by Provost Ferguson of Doonholm, in the parish of Alloway, which is now united with that of Ayr. In this parish, on the road side, a Scotch mile and a half from the town of Ayr, and half a mile from the bridge of Doon, William Burnes took a piece of land, consisting of about seven acres, part of which he laid out in garden ground, and part of which he

he kept to graze a cow, &c., still continuing in the employ of Provost Ferguson. Upon this little farm was erected a humble dwelling, of which William Burnes was the architect. It was, with the exception of a little straw, literally a tabernacle of clay. In this mean cottage, of which I myself was at times an inhabitant, I really believe there dwelt a larger portion of content than in any palace in Europe. The *Cotter's Saturday Night* will give some idea of the temper and manners that prevailed there.

" In 1765, about the middle of March, Mr. W. Burnes came to Ayr, and sent to the school where I was improving in writing, under my good friend Mr. Robinson, desiring that I would come and speak to him at a certain inn, and bring my writing-book with me. This was immediately complied with. Having examined my writing, he was pleased with it—(you will readily allow he was not difficult), and told me that he had received very satisfactory information of Mr. Tennant, the master of the English school, concerning my improvement in English and in his method of teaching. In the month of May following, I was engaged by Mr. Burnes, and four of his neighbours, to teach, and accordingly began to teach the little school at Alloway, which was situated a few yards from the argillaceous fabric above-mentioned. My five employers

ployers undertook to board me by turns, and to make up a certain salary, at the end of the year, provided my quarterly payments from the different pupils did not amount to that sum.

" My pupil, Robert Burns, was then between six and seven years of age; his preceptor about eighteen. Robert, and his younger brother, Gilbert, had been grounded a little in English before they were put under my care. They both made a rapid progress in reading, and a tolerable progress in writing. In reading, dividing words into syllables by rule, spelling without book, parsing sentences, &c., Robert and Gilbert were generally at the upper end of the class, even when ranged with boys by far their seniors. The books most commonly used in the school were the *Spelling Book*, the *New Testament*, the *Bible*, *Mason's Collection of Prose and Verse*, and *Fisher's English Grammar*. They committed to memory the hymns, and other poems of that collection, with uncommon facility. This facility was partly owing to the method pursued by their father and me in instructing them, which was, to make them thoroughly acquainted with the meaning of every word in each sentence that was to be committed to memory. By the bye, this may be easier done, and at an earlier period, than is generally thought. As soon as they were capable

ble of it, I taught them to turn verse into its natural prose order; sometimes to substitute synonymous expressions for poetical words, and to supply all the ellipses. These, you know, are the means of knowing that the pupil understands his author. These are excellent helps to the arrangement of words in sentences, as well as to a variety of expression.

"Gilbert always appeared to me to possess a more lively imagination, and to be more of the wit, than Robert. I attempted to teach them a little church-music. Here they were left far behind by all the rest of the school. Robert's ear, in particular, was remarkably dull, and his voice untunable. It was long before I could get them to distinguish one tune from another. Robert's countenance was generally grave, and expressive of a serious, contemplative, and thoughtful mind. Gilbert's face said, *Mirth, with thee I mean to live;* and certainly, if any person who knew the two boys, had been asked which of them was the most likely to court the muses, he would surely never have guessed that Robert had a propensity of that kind.

"In the year 1767, Mr. Burnes quitted his mud edifice, and took possession of a farm (Mount Oliphant) of his own improving, while in the service of Provost Ferguson. This farm being

being at a considerable distance from the school, the boys could not attend regularly; and some changes taking place among the other supporters of the school, I left it, having continued to conduct it for nearly two years and a half.

" In the year 1772, I was appointed (being one of five candidates who were examined) to teach the English school at Ayr; and in 1773, Robert Burns came to board and lodge with me, for the purpose of revising English grammar, &c., that he might be better qualified to instruct his brothers and sisters at home. He was now with me day and night, in school, at all meals, and in all my walks. At the end of one week, I told him, that, as he was now pretty much master of the parts of speech, &c., I should like to teach him something of French pronunciation, that when he should meet with the name of a French town, ship, officer, or the like, in the newspapers, he might be able to pronounce it something like a French word. Robert was glad to hear this proposal, and immediately we attacked the French with great courage.

" Now there was little else to be heard but the declension of nouns, the conjugation of verbs, &c. When walking together, and even at

at meals, I was constantly telling him the names of different objects, as they presented themselves, in French; so that he was hourly laying in a stock of words, and sometimes little phrases. In short, he took such pleasure in learning, and I in teaching, that it was difficult to say which of the two was most zealous in the business; and about the end of the second week of our study of the French, we began to read a little of the *Adventures of Telemachus*, in Fenelon's own words.

" But now the plains of Mount Oliphant began to whiten, and Robert was summoned to relinquish the pleasing scenes that surrounded the grotto of Calypso, and, armed with a sickle, to seek glory by signalizing himself in the fields of Ceres—and so he did; for although but about fifteen, I was told that he performed the work of a man.

" Thus was I deprived of my very apt pupil, and consequently agreeable companion, at the end of three weeks, one of which was spent entirely in the study of English, and the other two chiefly in that of French. I did not, however, lose sight of him; but was a frequent visitant at his father's house, when I had my half-holiday, and very often went accompanied with one or two persons more intelligent than myself,

self, that good William Burnes might enjoy a mental feast. Then the labouring oar was shifted to some other hand. The father and the son sat down with us, when we enjoyed a conversation, wherein solid reasoning, sensible remark, and a moderate seasoning of jocularity, were so nicely blended as to render it palatable to all parties. Robert had a hundred questions to ask me about the French, &c.; and the father, who had always rational information in view, had still some question to propose to my more learned friends, upon moral or natural philosophy, or some such interesting subject. Mrs. Burnes too was of the party as much as possible;

> 'But still the house affairs would draw her thence,
> Which ever as she could with haste dispatch,
> She'd come again, and with a greedy ear,
> Devour up their discourse'——

and particularly that of her husband. At all times, and in all companies, she listened to him with a more marked attention than to any body else. When under the necessity of being absent while he was speaking, she seemed to regret, as a real loss, that she had missed what the good man had said. This worthy woman, Agnes Brown, had the most thorough esteem for her husband of any woman I ever knew. I can by no means wonder that she highly esteemed him; for I myself have always considered William Burnes

Burnes as by far the best of the human race that ever I had the pleasure of being acquainted with—and many a worthy character I have known. I can cheerfully join with Robert in the last line of his epitaph (borrowed from Goldsmith),

'And ev'n his failings lean'd to virtue's side.'

"He was an excellent husband, if I may judge from his assiduous attention to the ease and comfort of his worthy partner, and from her affectionate behaviour to him, as well as her unwearied attention to the duties of a mother.

"He was a tender and affectionate father; he took pleasure in leading his children in the path of virtue; not in driving them, as some parents do, to the performance of duties to which they themselves are averse. He took care to find fault but very seldom; and therefore, when he did rebuke, he was listened to with a kind of reverential awe. A look of disapprobation was felt; a reproof was severely so: and a stripe with the *tawz*, even on the skirt of the coat, gave heart-felt pain, produced a loud lamentation, and brought forth a flood of tears.

"He had the art of gaining the esteem and good-will of those that were labourers under him.

him. I think I never saw him angry but twice: the one time it was with the foreman of the band, for not reaping the field as he was desired; and the other time, it was with an old man, for using smutty innuendoes and *doubles entendres*. Were every foul-mouth'd old man to receive a seasonable check in this way, it would be to the advantage of the rising generation. As he was at no time overbearing to inferiors, he was equally incapable of that passive, pitiful, paltry spirit, that induces some people to *keep booing and booing* in the presence of a great man. He always treated superiors with a becoming respect; but he never gave the smallest encouragement to aristocratical arrogance. But I must not pretend to give you a description of all the manly qualities, the rational and Christian virtues, of the venerable William Burnes. Time would fail me. I shall only add, that he carefully practised every known duty, and avoided every thing that was criminal; or, in the apostle's words, *Herein did he exercise himself, in living a life void of offence towards God and towards men.* O for a world of men of such dispositions! We should then have no wars. I have often wished, for the good of mankind, that it were as customary to honour and perpetuate the memory of those who excel in moral rectitude, as it is to extol what are called heroic actions: then would the mausoleum

leum of the friend of my youth overtop and surpass most of the monuments I see in Westminster Abbey.

" Although I cannot do justice to the character of this worthy man, yet you will perceive, from these few particulars, what kind of person had the principal hand in the education of our poet. He spoke the English language with more propriety (both with respect to diction and pronunciation), than any man I ever knew with no greater advantages. This had a very good effect on the boys, who began to talk, and reason like men, much sooner than their neighbours. I do not recollect any of their contemporaries, at my little seminary, who afterwards made any great figure as literary characters, except Dr. Tennant, who was chaplain to Colonel Fullarton's regiment, and who is now in the East Indies. He is a man of genius and learning; yet affable, and free from pedantry.

" Mr. Burnes, in a short time, found that he had over-rated Mount Oliphant, and that he could not rear his numerous family upon it.—After being there some years, he removed to Lochlea, in the parish of Tarbolton, where, I believe, Robert wrote most of his poems.

" But

"But here, Sir, you will permit me to pause. I can tell you but little more relative to our poet. I shall, however, in my next, send you a copy of one of his letters to me, about the year 1783.* I received one since, but it is mislaid. Please remember me, in the best manner, to my worthy friend Mr. Adair, when you see him, or write to him.

"Hart-street, Bloomsbury-square, London, Feb. 22, 1799."

As the narrative of Gilbert Burns was written at a time when he was ignorant of the existence of the preceding narrative of his brother, so this letter of Mr. Murdoch was written without his having any knowledge that either of his pupils had been employed on the same subject. The three relations serve, therefore, not merely to illustrate, but to authenticate each other. Though the information they convey might have been presented within a shorter compass, by reducing the whole into one unbroken narrative, it is scarcely to be doubted, that the intelligent reader will be far more gratified by a sight of these original documents themselves.

Under

* *See Vol.* ii. *p.* 1.

Under the humble roof of his parents, it appears indeed that our poet had great advantages; but his opportunities of information at school were more limited as to time than they usually are among his countrymen, in his condition of life; and the acquisitions which he made, and the poetical talent which he exerted, under the pressure of early and incessant toil, and of inferior, and perhaps scanty nutriment, testify at once the extraordinary force and activity of his mind. In his frame of body he rose nearly to five feet ten inches, and assumed the proportions that indicate agility as well as strength. In the various labours of the farm he excelled all his competitors. Gilbert Burns declares, that in mowing, the exercise that tries all the muscles most severely, Robert was the only man that, at the end of a summer's day, he was ever obliged to acknowledge as his master. But though our poet gave the powers of his body to the labours of the farm, he refused to bestow on them his thoughts or his cares. While the ploughshare under his guidance passed through the sward, or the grass fell under the sweep of his scythe, he was humming the songs of his country, musing on the deeds of ancient valour, or rapt in the illusions of Fancy, as her enchantments rose on his view. Happily the Sunday is yet a sabbath, on which man and beast rest from their labours. On this

day, therefore, Burns could indulge in a freer intercourse with the charms of nature. It was his delight to wander alone on the banks of the Ayr, whose stream is now immortal, and to listen to the song of the blackbird at the close of the summer's day. But still greater was his pleasure, as he himself informs us, in walking on the sheltered side of a wood, in a cloudy winter-day, and hearing the storm rave among the trees; and more elevated still his delight, to ascend some eminence during the agitations of nature, to stride along its summit, while the lightning flashed around him, and, amidst the howlings of the tempest, to apostrophize the spirit of the storm. Such situations he declares most favourable to devotion—"Rapt in enthusiasm, I seem to ascend towards Him *who walks on the wings of the wind!*" If other proofs were wanting of the character of his genius, this might determine it. The heart of the poet is peculiarly awake to every impression of beauty and sublimity; but, with the higher order of poets, the beautiful is less attractive than the sublime.

The gaiety of many of Burns's writings, and the lively, and even cheerful colouring with which he has portrayed his own character, may lead some persons to suppose, that the melancholy which hung over him towards the end of his

his days, was not an original part of his constitution. It is not to be doubted indeed, that this melancholy acquired a darker hue in the progress of his life; but, independent of his own and of his brother's testimony, evidence is to be found among his papers, that he was subject very early to those depressions of mind, which are perhaps not wholly separable from the sensibility of genius, but which in him arose to an uncommon degree. The following letter, addressed to his father, will serve as a proof of this observation. It was written at the time when he was learning the business of a flax-dresser, and is dated

Irvine, Dec. 27, 1781.

" HONOURED SIR,

" I HAVE purposely delayed writing, in the hope that I should have the pleasure of seeing you on New-year's day; but work comes so hard upon us, that I do not choose to be absent on that account, as well as for some other little reasons, which I shall tell you at meeting. My health is nearly the same as when you were here, only my sleep is a little sounder, and, on the whole, I am rather better than otherwise, though I mend by very slow degrees. The weakness of my nerves has so debilitated my mind, that I dare neither review past wants, nor look for-

ward into futurity; for the least anxiety or perturbation in my breast, produces most unhappy effects on my whole frame. Sometimes, indeed, when for an hour or two my spirits are a little lightened, I *glimmer* a little into futurity; but my principal, and indeed my only pleasurable employment, is looking backwards and forwards in a moral and religious way. I am quite transported at the thought, that ere long, perhaps very soon, I shall bid an eternal adieu to all the pains and uneasinesses, and disquietudes of this weary life; for I assure you I am heartily tired of it; and, if I do not very much deceive myself, I could contentedly and gladly resign it.

> 'The soul, uneasy, and confin'd at home,
> Rests and expatiates in a life to come.'

"It is for this reason I am more pleased with the 15th, 16th, and 17th verses of the 7th chapter of Revelations, than with any ten times as many verses in the whole Bible, and would not exchange the noble enthusiasm with which they inspire me for all that this world has to offer.* As

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* The verses of Scripture here alluded to, are as follows:

15. *Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.*

16. *They*

As for this world, I despair of ever making a figure in it. I am not formed for the bustle of the busy, nor the flutter of the gay. I shall never again be capable of entering into such scenes. Indeed I am altogether unconcerned at the thoughts of this life. I foresee that poverty and obscurity probably await me, and I am in some measure prepared, and daily preparing to meet them. I have but just time and paper to return you my grateful thanks for the lessons of virtue and piety you have given me, which were too much neglected at the time of giving them, but which, I hope, have been remembered ere it is yet too late. Present my dutiful respects to my mother, and my compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Muir; and, with wishing you a merry New-year's-day, I shall conclude.

"I am, honoured Sir,

"Your dutiful son,

"ROBERT BURNS."

"*P. S.* My meal is nearly out; but I am going to borrow, till I get more."

This

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16. *They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.*

17. *For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.*

This letter, written several years before the publication of his poems, when his name was as obscure as his condition was humble, displays the philosophic melancholy which so generally forms the poetical temperament, and that buoyant and ambitious spirit which indicates a mind conscious of its strength. At Irvine, Burns at this time possessed a single room for his lodging, rented perhaps at the rate of a shilling a-week. He passed his days in constant labour as a flax-dresser, and his food consisted chiefly of oatmeal sent to him from his father's family. The store of this humble, though wholesome nutriment, it appears was nearly exhausted, and he was about to borrow till he should obtain a supply. Yet even in this situation, his active imagination had formed to itself pictures of eminence and distinction. His despair of making a figure in the world, shews how ardently he wished for honourable fame; and his contempt of life, founded on this despair, is the genuine expression of a youthful and generous mind. In such a state of reflection, and of suffering, the imagination of Burns naturally passed the dark boundaries of our earthly horizon, and rested on those beautiful representations of a better world, where there is neither thirst, nor hunger, nor sorrow, and where happiness shall be in proportion to the capacity of happiness.

Such

Such a disposition is far from being at variance with social enjoyments. Those who have studied the affinities of mind, know that a melancholy of this description, after a while, seeks relief in the endearments of society, and that it has no distant connexion with the flow of cheerfulness, or even the extravagance of mirth. It was a few days after the writing of this letter that our poet, " in giving a welcoming carousal to the new year, with his gay companions," suffered his flax to catch fire, and his shop to be consumed to ashes.

The energy of Burns's mind was not exhausted by his daily labours, the effusions of his muse, his social pleasures, or his solitary meditations. Some time previous to his engagement as a flax-dresser, having heard that a debating club had been established in Ayr, he resolved to try how such a meeting would succeed in the village of Tarbolton. About the end of the year 1780, our poet, his brother, and five other young peasants of the neighbourhood, formed themselves into a society of this sort, the declared objects of which were to relax themselves after toil, to promote sociality and friendship, and to improve the mind. The laws and regulations were furnished by Burns. The members were to meet after the labours of the day were over, once a week, in a small public-house in the village;

village; where each should offer his opinion on a given question or subject, supporting it by such arguments as he thought proper. The debate was to be conducted with order and decorum; and after it was finished, the members were to choose a subject for discussion at the ensuing meeting. The sum expended by each was not to exceed three-pence; and, with the humble potation that this could procure, they were to toast their mistresses, and to cultivate friendship with each other. This society continued its meetings regularly for some time; and in the autumn of 1782, wishing to preserve some account of their proceedings, they purchased a book, into which their laws and regulations were copied, with a preamble, containing a short history of their transactions down to that period. This curious document, which is evidently the work of our poet, has been discovered, and it deserves a place in his memoirs.

"*History of the Rise, Proceedings, and Regulations of the Bachelor's Club.*

'Of birth or blood we do not boast,
Nor gentry does our club afford;
But ploughmen and mechanics we
In Nature's simple dress record.

"As the great end of human society is to become wiser and better, this ought therefore to

to be the principal view of every man in every station of life. But as experience has taught us, that such studies as inform the head and mend the heart, when long continued, are apt to exhaust the faculties of the mind, it has been found proper to relieve and unbend the mind by some employment or another, that may be agreeable enough to keep its powers in exercise, but at the same time not so serious as to exhaust them. But, superadded to this, by far the greater part of mankind are under the necessity *of earning the sustenance of human life by the labour of their bodies*, whereby, not only the faculties of the mind, but the nerves and sinews of the body, are so fatigued, that it is absolutely necessary to have recourse to some amusement or diversion, to relieve the wearied man, worn down with the necessary labours of life.

"As the best of things, however, have been perverted to the worst of purposes, so, under the pretence of amusement and diversion, men have plunged into all the madness of riot and dissipation; and, instead of attending to the grand design of human life, they have begun with extravagance and folly, and ended with guilt and wretchedness. Impressed with these considerations, we, the following lads in the parish of Tarbolton, viz. Hugh Reid, Robert Burns, Gilbert Burns, Alexander Brown, Walter Mitchel,

Mitchel, Thomas Wright, and William M'Gavin, resolved, for our mutual entertainment, to unite ourselves into a club or society, under such rules and regulations, that while we should forget our cares and labours in mirth and diversion, we might not transgress the bounds of innocence and decorum; and after agreeing on these, and some other regulations, we held our first meeting at Tarbolton, in the house of John Richard, upon the evening of the 11th of November, 1780, commonly called Hallowe'en, and after choosing Robert Burns president for the night, we proceeded to debate on this question —*Suppose a young man, bred a farmer, but without any fortune, has it in his power to marry either of two women, the one a girl of large fortune, but neither handsome in person, nor agreeable in conversation, but who can manage the household affairs of a farm well enough; the other of them a girl every way agreeable, in person, conversation, and behaviour, but without any fortune: which of them shall he choose?* Finding ourselves very happy in our society, we resolved to continue to meet once a month in the same house, in the way and manner proposed, and shortly thereafter we chose Robert Ritchie for another member. In May, 1781, we brought in David Sillar,* and in June, Adam

* The person to whom Burns addressed his *Epistle to Davie, a brother poet.*

Adam Jamaison, as members. About the beginning of the year 1782, we admitted Matthew Patterson, and John Orr, and in June following we chose James Patterson as a proper brother for such a society. The club being thus increased, we resolved to meet at Tarbolton on the race-night, the July following, and have a dance in honour of our society. Accordingly we did meet, each one with a partner, and spent the evening in such innocence and merriment, such cheerfulness and good humour, that every brother will long remember it with pleasure and delight." To this preamble are subjoined the rules and regulations.*

The philosophical mind will dwell with interest and pleasure, on an institution that combined so skilfully the means of instruction and of happiness; and if grandeur look down with a smile on these simple annals, let us trust that it will be a smile of benevolence and approbation. It is with regret that the sequel of the history of the Bachelor's Club of Tarbolton must be told. It survived several years after our poet removed from Ayrshire, but no longer sustained by his talents, or cemented by his social affections, its meetings lost much of their attraction; and at length, in an evil hour, dissension

* For which see *Appendix, No.* II. *Note* C.

sension arising amongst its members, the institution was given up, and the records committed to the flames. Happily the preamble and the regulations were spared; and, as matter of instruction and of example, they are transmitted to posterity.

After the family of our bard removed from Tarbolton to the neighbourhood of Mauchline, he and his brother were requested to assist in forming a similar institution there. The regulations of the club at Mauchline were nearly the same as those of the club at Tarbolton; but one laudable alteration was made. The fines for non-attendance had at Tarbolton been spent in enlarging their scanty potations: at Mauchline it was fixed, that the money so arising, should be set apart for the purchase of books, and the first work procured in this manner was the *Mirror*, the separate numbers of which were at that time recently collected and published in volumes. After it, followed a number of other works, chiefly of the same nature, and among these the *Lounger*. The society of Mauchline still subsists, and appeared in the list of subscribers to the first edition of the works of its celebrated associate.

The members of these two societies were originally all young men from the country, and chiefly

chiefly sons of farmers; a description of persons, in the opinion of our poet, more agreeable in their manners, more virtuous in their conduct, and more susceptible of improvement, than the self-sufficient mechanics of country-towns. With deference to the Conversation-society of Mauchline, it may be doubted, whether the books which they purchased were of a kind best adapted to promote the interest and happiness of persons in this situation of life. The *Mirror* and the *Lounger*, though works of great merit, may be said, on a general view of their contents, to be less calculated to increase the knowledge, than to refine the taste of those who read them; and to this last object their morality itself, which is however always perfectly pure, may be considered as subordinate. As works of taste, they deserve great praise. They are, indeed, refined to a high degree of delicacy; and to this circumstance it is perhaps owing, that they exhibit little or nothing of the peculiar manners of the age or country in which they were produced. But delicacy of taste, though the source of many pleasures, is not without some disadvantages; and to render it desirable, the possessor should perhaps in all cases be raised above the necessity of bodily labour, unless indeed we should include under this term the exercise of the imitative arts, over which taste immediately presides. Delicacy of taste may

may be a blessing to him who has the disposal of his own time, and who can choose what book he shall read, of what diversion he shall partake, and what company he shall keep. To men so situated, the cultivation of taste affords a grateful occupation in itself, and opens a path to many other gratifications. To men of genius, in the possession of opulence and leisure, the cultivation of the taste may be said to be essential; since it affords employment to those faculties, which without employment would destroy the happiness of the possessor, and corrects that morbid sensibility, or, to use the expression of Mr. Hume, that delicacy of passion, which is the bane of the temperament of genius. Happy had it been for our bard, after he emerged from the condition of a peasant, had the delicacy of his taste equalled the sensibility of his passions, regulating all the effusions of his muse, and presiding over all his social enjoyments. But to the thousands who share the original condition of Burns, and who are doomed to pass their lives in the station in which they were born, delicacy of taste, were it even of easy attainment, would, if not a positive evil, be at least a doubtful blessing. Delicacy of taste may make many necessary labours irksome or disgusting; and should it render the cultivator of the soil unhappy in his situation, it presents no means by which that situation may be

be improved. Taste and literature, which diffuse so many charms throughout society, which sometimes secure to their votaries distinction while living, and which still more frequently obtain for them posthumous fame, seldom procure opulence, or even independence, when cultivated with the utmost attention, and can scarcely be pursued with advantage by the peasant in the short intervals of leisure which his occupations allow. Those who raise themselves from the condition of daily labour, are usually men who excel in the practice of some useful art, or who join habits of industry and sobriety to an acquaintance with some of the more common branches of knowledge. The penmanship of Butterworth, and the arithmetic of Cocker, may be studied by men in the humblest walks of life; and they will assist the peasant more in the pursuit of independence, than the study of Homer or of Shakespeare, though he could comprehend, and even imitate, the beauties of those immortal bards.

These observations are not offered without some portion of doubt and hesitation. The subject has many relations, and would justify an ample discussion. It may be observed, on the other hand, that the first step to improvement is to awaken the desire of improvement, and that this will be most effectually done by such reading

reading as interests the heart and excites the imagination. The greater part of the sacred writings themselves, which in Scotland are more especially the manual of the poor, come under this description. It may be farther observed, that every human being is the proper judge of his own happiness, and within the path of innocence, ought to be permitted to pursue it. Since it is the taste of the Scottish peasantry to give a preference to works of taste and of fancy,* it may be presumed they find a superior gratification in the perusal of such works; and it may be added, that it is of more consequence they should be made happy in their original condition, than furnished with the means, or with the desire, of rising above it. Such considerations are doubtless of much weight; nevertheless, the previous reflections may deserve to be examined, and here we shall leave the subject.

Though the records of the society at Tarbolton are lost, and those of the society at Mauchline have not been transmitted, yet we may

* In several lists of book-societies among the poorer classes in Scotland which the Editor has seen, works of this description form a great part. These societies are by no means general, and it is not supposed that they are increasing at present.

may safely affirm, that our poet was a distinguished member of both these associations, which were well calculated to excite and to develope the powers of his mind. From seven to twelve persons constituted the society of Tarbolton, and such a number is best suited to the purposes of information. Where this is the object of these societies, the number should be such, that each person may have an opportunity of imparting his sentiments, as well as of receiving those of others; and the powers of private conversation are to be employed, not those of public debate. A limited society of this kind, where the subject of conversation is fixed beforehand, so that each member may revolve it previously in his mind, is perhaps one of the happiest contrivances hitherto discovered for shortening the acquisition of knowledge, and hastening the evolution of talents. Such an association requires indeed somewhat more of regulation than the rules of politeness establish in common conversation; or rather, perhaps, it requires that the rules of politeness, which in animated conversation are liable to perpetual violation, should be vigorously enforced. The order of speech established in the club at Tarbolton, appears to have been more regular than was required in so small a society;* where

* *See Appendix, No. II. Note C.*

all that is necessary seems to be, the fixing on a member to whom every speaker shall address himself, and who shall in return secure the speaker from interruption. Conversation, which among men whom intimacy and friendship have relieved from reserve and restraint, is liable, when left to itself, to so many inequalities, and which, as it becomes rapid, so often diverges into separate and collateral branches, in which it is dissipated and lost, being kept within its channel by a simple limitation of this kind, which practice renders easy and familiar, flows along in one full stream, and becomes smoother, and clearer, and deeper, as it flows. It may also be observed, that in this way the acquisition of knowledge becomes more pleasant and more easy, from the gradual improvement of the faculty employed to convey it. Though some attention has been paid to the eloquence of the senate and the bar, which in this, as in all other free governments, is productive of so much influence to the few who excel in it, yet little regard has been paid to the humbler exercise of speech in private conversation, an art that is of consequence to every description of persons under every form of government, and on which eloquence of every kind ought perhaps to be founded.

The first requisite of every kind of elocution, a distinct utterance, is the offspring of much

much time, and of long practice. Children are always defective in clear articulation, and so are young people, though in a less degree. What is called slurring in speech, prevails with some persons through life, especially in those who are taciturn. Articulation does not seem to reach its utmost degree of distinctness in men before the age of twenty, or upwards; in women it reaches this point somewhat earlier. Female occupations require much use of speech, because they are duties in detail. Besides, their occupations being generally sedentary, the respiration is left at liberty. Their nerves being more delicate, their sensibility as well as fancy is more lively; the natural consequence of which is, a more frequent utterance of thought, a greater fluency of speech, and a distinct articulation at an earlier age. But in men who have not mingled early and familiarly with the world, though rich perhaps in knowledge, and clear in apprehension, it is often painful to observe the difficulty with which their ideas are communicated by speech, through the want of those habits that connect thoughts, words, and sounds together; which, when established, seem as if they had arisen spontaneously, but which, in truth, are the result of long and painful practice, and when analyzed, exhibit the phenomena of most curious and complicated association.

Societies then, such as we have been describing, while they may be said to put each member in possession of the knowledge of all the rest, improve the powers of utterance, and by the collision of opinion, excite the faculties of reason and reflection. To those who wish to improve their minds in such intervals of labour as the condition of a peasant allows, this method of abbreviating instruction, may, under proper regulations, be highly useful. To the student, whose opinions, springing out of solitary observation and meditation, are seldom in the first instance correct, and which have notwithstanding, while confined to himself, an increasing tendency to assume in his own eye the character of demonstrations, an association of this kind, where they may be examined as they arise, is of the utmost importance; since it may prevent those illusions of imagination, by which genius being bewildered, science is often debased, and error propagated through successive generations. And to men who having cultivated letters, or general science, in the course of their education, are engaged in the active occupations of life, and no longer able to devote to study or to books the time requisite for improving or preserving their acquisitions, associations of this kind, where the mind may unbend from its usual cares in discussions of literature or science, afford

ford the most pleasing, the most useful, and the most rational of gratifications.*

Whether in the humble societies of which he was a member, Burns acquired much direct information, may perhaps be questioned. It cannot however be doubted, that by collision, the faculties of his mind would be excited, that by practice, his habits of enunciation would be established, and thus we have some explanation of that early command of words and of expression which enabled him to pour forth his thoughts in language not unworthy of his genius, and which, of all his endowments, seemed, on

* When letters and philosophy were cultivated in ancient Greece, the press had not multiplied the tablets of learning and science, and necessity produced the habit of studying as it were in common. Poets were found reciting their own verses in public assemblies; in public schools only philosophers delivered their speculations. The taste of the hearers, the ingenuity of the scholars, were employed in appreciating and examining the works of fancy and of speculation submitted to their consideration, and the *irrevocable words* were not given to the world before the composition, as well as the sentiments, were again and again retouched and improved. Death alone put the last seal on the labours of genius. Hence, perhaps, may be in part explained the extraordinary art and skill with which the monuments of Grecian literature that remain to us, appear to have been constructed.

on his appearance in Edinburgh, the most extraordinary.* For associations of a literary nature, our poet acquired a considerable relish; and happy had it been for him, after he emerged from the condition of a peasant, if fortune had permitted him to enjoy them in the degree of which he was capable, so as to have fortified his principles of virtue by the purification of his taste, and given to the energies of his mind habits of exertion that might have excluded other associations, in which it must be acknowledged they were too often wasted, as well as debased.

The

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* It appears that our Poet made more preparation than might be supposed, for the discussions of the society of Tarbolton.—There were found some detached memoranda, evidently prepared for these meetings; and, among others, the heads of a speech on the question mentioned in *p.* 106, in which, as might be expected, he takes the *imprudent* side of the question. The following may serve as a farther specimen of the questions debated in the society at Tarbolton:—*Whether do we derive more happiness from love or friendship?—Whether between friends, who have no reason to doubt each other's friendship, there should be any reserve?—Whether is the savage man, or the peasant of a civilized country, in the most happy situation?—Whether is a young man of the lower ranks of life likeliest to be happy, who has got a good education, and his mind well informed, or he who has just the education and information of those around him?*

The whole course of the Ayr is fine; but the banks of that river, as it bends to the eastward above Mauchline, are singularly beautiful, and they were frequented, as may be imagined, by our poet in his solitary walks. Here the muse often visited him. In one of these wanderings, he met among the woods a celebrated Beauty of the west of Scotland; a lady, of whom it is said, that the charms of her person correspond with the character of her mind. This incident gave rise, as might be expected, to a poem, of which an account will be found in the following letter, in which he enclosed it to the object of his inspiration:

To MISS ———.

Mossgiel, 18*th Nov.* 1786.

" MADAM,

" POETS are such outré beings, so much the children of wayward fancy and capricious whim, that I believe the world generally allows them a larger latitude in the laws of propriety, than the sober sons of judgment and prudence. I mention this as an apology for the liberties that a nameless stranger has taken with you in the enclosed poem, which he begs leave to present you with. Whether it has poetical merit any

any way worthy of the theme, I am not the proper judge; but it is the best my abilities can produce; and, what to a good heart will perhaps be a superior grace, it is equally sincere as fervent.

"The scenery was nearly taken from real life, though I dare say, Madam, you do not recollect it, as I believe you scarcely noticed the poetic *reveur* as he wandered by you. I had roved out as chance directed, in the favourite haunts of my muse, on the banks of the Ayr, to view nature in all the gaiety of the vernal year. The evening sun was flaming over the distant western hills; not a breath stirred the crimson opening blossom, or the verdant spreading leaf. It was a golden moment for a poetic heart. I listened to the feathered warblers, pouring their harmony on every hand, with a congenial kindred regard, and frequently turned out of my path, lest I should disturb their little songs, or frighten them to another station. Surely, said I to myself, he must be a wretch indeed, who, regardless of your harmonious endeavour to please him, can eye your elusive flights to discover your secret recesses, and to rob you of all the property nature gives you, your dearest comforts, your helpless nestlings. Even the hoary hawthorn twig that shot across the way, what heart at such a time but must

must have been interested in its welfare, and wished it preserved from the rudely-browsing cattle, or the withering eastern blast? Such was the scene—and such the hour, when in a corner of my prospect, I spied one of the fairest pieces of Nature's workmanship that ever crowned a poetic landscape, or met a poet's eye, those visionary bards excepted who hold commerce with aërial beings! Had Calumny and Villany taken my walk, they had at that moment sworn eternal peace with such an object.

"What an hour of inspiration for a poet! It would have raised plain, dull, historic prose into metaphor and measure.

"The enclosed song was the work of my return home; and perhaps it but poorly answers what might have been expected from such a scene.

* * * * * * *

"I have the honour to be,
"Madam,
"Your most obedient, and very
"humble servant,
"ROBERT BURNS."

'TWAS

'Twas even—the dewy fields were green,
On every blade the pearls hang;*
The Zephyr wanton'd round the bean,
And bore its fragrant sweets alang:
In every glen the mavis sang,
All nature listening seemed the while,
Except where green-wood echoes rang,
Amang the braes o' Ballochmyle.

With careless step I onward strayed,
My heart rejoiced in nature's joy,
When musing in a lonely glade,
A maiden fair I chanced to spy;
Her look was like the morning's eye,
Her air like nature's vernal smile,
Perfection whispered passing by,
Behold the lass o' Ballochmyle!†

Fair is the morn in flowery May,
And sweet is night in Autumn mild;
When roving through the garden gay,
Or wandering in the lonely wild:
But woman, nature's darling child!
There all her charms she does compile;
Even there her other works are foil'd
By the bonny lass o' Ballochmyle.

O had she been a country maid,
And I the happy country swain,
Tho' sheltered in the lowest shed
That ever rose on Scotland's plain,

Thro'

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* *Hang*, Scotticism for *hung*.

† *Variation*. The lily's hue and rose's dye
Bespoke the lass o' Ballochmyle.

Thro' weary winter's wind and rain,
With joy, with rapture, I would toil;
And nightly to my bosom strain
The bonny lass o' Ballochmyle.

Then pride might climb the slippery steep,
Where fame and honours lofty shine;
And thirst of gold might tempt the deep,
Or downward seek the Indian mine;
Give me the cot below the pine,
To tend the flocks or till the soil,
And every day have joys divine,
With the bonny lass o'Ballochmyle.

In the manuscript book in which our poet has recounted this incident, and into which the letter and poem are copied, he complains that the lady made no reply to his effusions, and this appears to have wounded his self-love. It is not, however, difficult to find an excuse for her silence. Burns was at that time little known; and where known at all, noted rather for the wild strength of his humour, than for those strains of tenderness in which he afterwards so much excelled. To the lady herself his name had perhaps never been mentioned, and of such a poem she might not consider herself as the proper judge. Her modesty might prevent her from perceiving that the muse of Tibullus breathed in this nameless poet, and that her beauty was awakening strains destined to immortality on the banks of the Ayr. It may be conceived,

conceived, also, that supposing the verse duly appreciated, delicacy might find it difficult to express its acknowledgments. The fervent imagination of the rustic bard possessed more of tenderness than of respect. Instead of raising himself to the condition of the object of his admiration, he presumed to reduce her to his own, and to strain this high-born beauty to his daring bosom. It is true, Burns might have found precedents for such freedoms among the poets of Greece and Rome, and indeed of every country. And it is not to be denied, that lovely women have generally submitted to this sort of profanation with patience and even with good humour. To what purpose is it to repine at a misfortune which is the necessary consequence of their own charms, or to remonstrate with a description of men who are incapable of control?

> "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,
> Are of imagination all compact."

It may be easily presumed, that the beautiful nymph of Ballochmyle, whoever she may have been, did not reject with scorn the adorations of our poet, though she received them with silent modesty and dignified reserve.

The sensibility of our bard's temper, and the force of his imagination, exposed him in a particular

ticular manner to the impressions of beauty; and these qualities, united to his impassioned eloquence, gave him in turn a powerful influence over the female heart. The banks of the Ayr formed the scene of youthful passions of a still tenderer nature, the history of which it would be improper to reveal, were it even in our power, and the traces of which will soon be discoverable only in those strains of nature and sensibility to which they gave birth. The song in *vol.* iv. *p.* 17, entitled *Highland Mary,* is known to relate to one of these attachments. "It was written," says our bard, "on one of the most interesting passages of my youthful days." The object of this passion died early in life, and the impression left on the mind of Burns seems to have been deep and lasting. Several years afterwards, when he was removed to Nithsdale, he gave vent to the sensibility of his recollections in the following impassioned lines.—In the manuscript book from which we extract them, they are addressed *To Mary in Heaven!*

THOU lingering star, with less'ning ray,
That lov'st to greet the early morn,
Again thou usher'st in the day
My Mary from my soul was torn.
O Mary! dear departed shade!
Where is thy place of blissful rest?
Seest thou thy lover lowly laid?
Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?

That

That sacred hour can I forget,
Can I forget the hallowed grove,
Where by the winding Ayr we met,
To live one day of parting love!
Eternity will not efface
Those records dear of transports past;
Thy image at our last embrace;
Ah! little thought we 'twas our last!
Ayr gurgling kissed his pebbled shore,
O'erhung with wild woods, thick'ning, green;
The fragrant birch, and hawthorn hoar,
Twin'd amorous round the raptured scene.
The flowers sprang wanton to be prest,
The birds sang love on every spray,
'Till too, too soon, the glowing west
Proclaim'd the speed of winged day.
Still o'er these scenes my mem'ry wakes,
And fondly broods with miser care;
Time but the impression stronger makes,
As streams their channels deeper wear.
My Mary, dear departed shade!
Where is thy place of blissful rest?
Seest thou thy lover lowly laid?
Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast.

To the delineations of the poet by himself, by his brother, and by his tutor, these additions are necessary, in order that the reader may see his character in its various aspects, and may have an opportunity of forming a just notion of the variety, as well as of the power of his original genius.*

We

* The history of the poems formerly printed, will be found in the Appendix to the third volume, in which these

We have dwelt the longer on the early part of his life, because it is the least known, and because as has already been mentioned, this part of his history is connected with some views of the condition

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these poems are contained.—It is there inserted in the words of Gilbert Burns, who, in a letter addressed to the Editor, has given the following account of the friends which Robert's talents procured him before he left Ayrshire, or attracted the notice of the world.

" The farm of Mossgiel, at the time of our coming to it, (Martinmas, 1783,) was the property of the Earl of Loudon, but was held in tack by Mr. Gavin Hamilton, writer, in Mauchline, from whom we had our bargain; who had thus an opportunity of knowing, and shewing a sincere regard for my brother, before he knew that he was a poet. The poet's estimation of him, and the strong outlines of his character, may be collected from the dedication to this gentleman. When the publication was begun, Mr. H. entered very warmly into its interests, and promoted the subscription very extensively. Mr. Robert Aiken, writer in Ayr, is a man of worth and taste, of warm affections, and connected with a most respectable circle of friends and relations. It is to this gentleman *The Cotter's Saturday Night* is inscribed. The poems of my brother which I have formerly mentioned, no sooner came into his hands, than they were quickly known, and well received in the extensive circle of Mr. Aiken's friends, which gave them a sort of currency, necessary in this wise world, even for the good reception of things valuable in themselves. But Mr. Aiken not only admired

dition and manners of the humblest ranks of society, hitherto little observed, and which will perhaps be found neither useless nor uninteresting. About

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admired the poet; as soon as he became acquainted with him, he shewed the warmest regard for the man, and did every thing in his power to forward his interest and respectability. *The Epistle to a young Friend* was addressed to this gentleman's son, Mr. A. H. Aiken, now of Liverpool. He was the oldest of a young family, who were taught to receive my brother with respect, as a man of genius, and their father's friend.

" *The Brigs of Ayr* is inscribed to John Ballantine, Esq. Banker in Ayr; one of those gentlemen to whom my brother was introduced by Mr. Aiken. He interested himself very warmly in my brother's concerns, and constantly shewed the greatest friendship and attachment to him. When the Kilmarnock edition was all sold off, and a considerable demand pointed out the propriety of publishing a second edition, Mr. Wilson, who had printed the first, was asked if he would print the second, and take his chance of being paid from the first sale. This he declined, and when this came to Mr. Ballantine's knowledge, he generously offered to accommodate Robert with what money he might need for that purpose; but advised him to go to Edinburgh, as the fittest place for publishing. When he did go to Edinburgh, his friends advised him to publish again by subscription, so that he did not need to accept this offer. Mr. William Parker, merchant in Kilmarnock, was a subscriber for thirty-five copies of the Kilmarnock edition. This may

About the time of his leaving his native county, his correspondence commences; and in the series of letters now given to the world, the chief incidents

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may perhaps appear not deserving of notice here; but if the comparative obscurity of the poet, at this period, be taken into consideration, it appears to me a greater effort of generosity, than many things which appear more brilliant in my brother's future history.

"Mr. Robert Muir, merchant, in Kilmarnock, was one of those friends Robert's poetry had procured him, and one who was dear to his heart. This gentleman had no very great fortune, or long line of dignified ancestry; but what Robert says of Captain Matthew Henderson, might be said of him with great propriety, *that he held the patent of his honours immediately from Almighty God.* Nature had indeed marked him a gentleman in the most legible characters. He died while yet a young man, soon after the publication of my brother's first Edinburgh edition. Sir William Cunningham of Robertland, paid a very flattering attention, and shewed a good deal of friendship for the poet. Before his going to Edinburgh, as well as after, Robert seemed peculiarly pleased with Professor Stewart's friendship and conversation.

"But of all the friendships which Robert acquired in Ayrshire and elsewhere, none seemed more agreeable to him than that of Mrs. Dunlop, of Dunlop, nor any which has been more uniformly and constantly exerted in behalf of him and his family; of which, were it proper, I could give many instances. Robert was on the

incidents of the remaining part of his life will be found. This authentic, though melancholy record will supersede in future the necessity of any extended narrative.

BURNS

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point of setting out for Edinburgh had heard of him. About the time of my brother's publishing in Kilmarnock, she had been afflicted with a long and severe illness, which had reduced her mind to the most distressing state of depression. In this situation, a copy of the printed poems was laid on her table by a friend, and happening to open on *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, she read it over with the greatest pleasure and surprise; the poet's description of the simple cottagers, operating on her mind like the charm of a powerful exorcist, expelling the demon *ennui*, and restoring her to her wonted inward harmony and satisfaction.—Mrs. Dunlop sent off a person express to Mossgiel, distant fifteen or sixteen miles, with a very obliging letter to my brother, desiring him to send her half a dozen copies of his poems, if he had them to spare, and begging he would do her the pleasure of calling at Dunlop House as soon as convenient. This was the beginning of a correspondence which ended only with the poet's life. The last use he made of his pen was writing a short letter to this lady a few days before his death.

" Col. Fullarton, who afterwards paid a very particular attention to the poet, was not in the country at the time of his first commencing author. At this distance of time, and in the hurry of a wet day, snatched from laborious occupations, I may have forgot some persons who

BURNS set out for Edinburgh in the month of November, 1786. He was furnished with a letter of introduction to Dr. Blacklock, from the gentleman to whom the Doctor had addressed the letter which is represented by our bard as the immediate cause of his visiting the Scottish metropolis. He was acquainted with Mr. Stewart, Professor of Moral Philosophy in the university, and had been entertained by that gentleman at Catrine, his estate in Ayrshire. He had been introduced by Mr. Alexander Dalzel to the Earl of Glencairn, who had expressed his high approbation of his poetical talents. He had friends therefore who could introduce him into the circles of literature as well as of fashion, and his own man-

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who ought to have been mentioned on this occasion, for which if it come to my knowledge I shall be heartily sorry."

The friendship of Mrs. Dunlop was of particular value to Burns. This lady, daughter and sole heiress to Sir Thomas Wallace of Craigie, and lineal descendant of the illustrious Wallace, the first of Scottish warriors, possesses the qualities of mind suited to her high lineage. Preserving, in the decline of life, the generous affections of youth; her admiration of the poet was soon accompanied by a sincere friendship for the man; which pursued him in after life through good and evil report; in poverty, in sickness, and in sorrow; and which is continued to his infant family, now deprived of their parent.

ners and appearance exceeding every expectation that could have been formed of them, he soon became an object of general curiosity and admiration. The following circumstance contributed to this in a considerable degree.—At the time when Burns arrived in Edinburgh, the periodical paper, entitled *The Lounger*, was publishing, every *Saturday* producing a successive number. His poems had attracted the notice of the gentlemen engaged in that undertaking, and the ninety-seventh number of those unequal, though frequently beautiful essays, is devoted to *An Account of Robert Burns, the Ayrshire ploughman, with Extracts from his poems*, written by the elegant pen of Mr. Mackenzie.* The *Lounger* had an extensive circulation among persons of taste and literature, not in Scotland only, but in various parts of England, to whose acquaintance therefore our bard was immediately introduced. The paper of Mr. Mackenzie was calculated to introduce him advantageously. The extracts are well selected; the criticisms and reflections are judicious as well as generous; and in the style and sentiments there is that happy delicacy, by which the writings of the author are so eminently distinguished.

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* This paper has been attributed, but improperly, to Lord Craig, one of the Scottish judges, author of the very interesting account of Michael Bruce, in the 36th number of the *Mirror*.

distinguished. The extracts from Burns's poems in the ninety-seventh number of *The Lounger*, were copied into the London as well as into many of the provincial papers, and the fame of our bard spread throughout the island. Of the manners, character, and conduct of Burns at this period, the following account has been given by Mr. Stewart, Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh, in a letter to the editor, which he is particularly happy to have obtained permission to insert in these memoirs.

"THE first time I saw Robert Burns was on the 23d of October, 1786, when he dined at my house in Ayrshire, together with our common friend Mr. John Mackenzie, surgeon, in Mauchline, to whom I am indebted for the pleasure of his acquaintance. I am enabled to mention the date particularly, by some verses which Burns wrote after he returned home, and in which the day of our meeting is recorded.—My excellent and much lamented friend, the late Basil, Lord Daer, happened to arrive at Catrine the same day, and by the kindness and frankness of his manners, left an impression on the mind of the poet, which never was effaced. The verses I allude to are among the most imperfect of his pieces; but a few stanzas may perhaps be an object of curiosity to you, both

on

on account of the character to which they relate, and of the light which they throw on the situation and feelings of the writer, before his name was known to the public.*

" I cannot

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* This poem is as follows:

This wot ye all whom it concerns,
I, Rhymer Robin, alias Burns,
October twenty-third,
A ne'er-to-be-forgotten day,
Sae far I sprackled† up the brae,
I dinner'd wi' a Lord.

I've been at druken *writers'*‡ feasts,
Nay, been bitch-fou 'mang godly priests,
Wi' reverence be it spoken;
I've even join'd the honour'd jorum,
When mighty Squireships of the quorum,
Their hydra drouth did sloken.

But wi' a Lord—stand out my shin,
A Lord—a Peer—an Earl's son,
Up higher yet my bonnet;
An sic a Lord—lang Scotch ells twa,
Our Peerage he o'erlooks them a',
As I look o'er my sonnet.

But oh for Hogarth's magic pow'r!
To show Sir Bardy's willyart glowr,§
And how he star'd and stammer'd,

When

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† Clambered. ‡ Attorneys.
§ Frighted stare—Wild, strange, timid, stare. E.

" I cannot positively say, at this distance of time, whether, at the period of our first acquaintance,

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When goavan,* as if led wi' branks,†
An' stumpan on his ploughman shanks,
He in the parlour hammer'd.

I sidling shelter'd in a nook,
An' at his lordship steal't a look,
Like some portentous omen;
Except good-sense and social glee,
An' (what surpris'd me) modesty,
I marked nought uncommon.

I watch'd the symptoms o' the Great,
The gentle pride, the lordly state,
The arrogant assuming;
The feint a pride, nae pride had he,
Nor sauce, nor state that I could see,
Mair than an honest ploughman.

Then from his Lordship I shall learn,
Henceforth to meet with unconcern,
One rank as well's another;
Nae *honest worthy* man need care,
To meet with noble youthful DAER,
For he but meets a brother.

These lines will be read with no common interest by all who remember the unaffected simplicity of appearance, the sweetness of countenance and manners, and the unsuspecting benevolence of heart, of Basil, Lord Daer.

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* Walking stupidly. *Goavan*--looking round with a strange inquiring gaze. E.

† A kind of bridle.

quaintance, the Kilmarnock edition of his poems had been just published, or was yet in the press. I suspect that the latter was the case, as I have still in my possession copies in his own hand-writing, of some of his favourite performances; particularly of his verses "on turning up a Mouse with his plough;"—"on the Mountain Daisy;" and "the Lament." On my return to Edinburgh, I shewed the volume, and mentioned what I knew of the author's history, to several of my friends, and, among others, to Mr. Henry Mackenzie, who first recommended him to public notice in the 97th number of *The Lounger*.

"At this time Burns's prospects in life were so extremely gloomy, that he had seriously formed a plan of going out to Jamaica in a very humble situation, not however without lamenting, that his want of patronage should force him to think of a project so repugnant to his feelings, when his ambition aimed at no higher an object than the station of an exciseman or gauger in his own country.

"His manners were then, as they continued ever afterwards, simple, manly, and independent; strongly expressive of conscious genius and worth; but without any thing that indicated forwardness, arrogance, or vanity. He took

took his share in conversation, but not more than belonged to him; and listened with apparent attention and deference, on subjects where his want of education deprived him of the means of information. If there had been a little more of gentleness and accommodation in his temper, he would, I think, have been still more interesting; but he had been accustomed to give law in the circle of his ordinary acquaintance; and his dread of any thing approaching to meanness or servility, rendered his manner somewhat decided and hard. Nothing, perhaps, was more remarkable among his various attainments, than the fluency, and precision, and originality of his language, when he spoke in company; more particularly as he aimed at purity in his turn of expression, and avoided more successfully than most Scotchmen, the peculiarities of Scottish phraseology.

"He came to Edinburgh early in the winter following, and remained there for several months. By whose advice he took this step, I am unable to say. Perhaps it was suggested only by his own curiosity to see a little more of the world; but, I confess, I dreaded the consequences from the first, and always wished that his pursuits and habits should continue the same as in the former part of life; with the addition of, what I considered as then completely within his reach, a good

a good farm on moderate terms, in a part of the country agreeable to his taste.

" The attentions he received during his stay in town from all ranks and descriptions of persons, were such as would have turned any head but his own. I cannot say that I could perceive any unfavourable effect which they left on his mind. He retained the same simplicity of manners and appearance which had struck me so forcibly when I first saw him in the country; nor did he seem to feel any additional self-importance from the number and rank of his new acquaintance. His dress was perfectly suited to his station, plain and unpretending, with a sufficient attention to neatness. If I recollect right he always wore boots; and, when on more than usual ceremony, buck-skin breeches.

" The variety of his engagements, while in Edinburgh, prevented me from seeing him so often as I could have wished. In the course of the spring he called on me once or twice, at my request, early in the morning, and walked with me to Braid-Hills, in the neighbourhood of the town, when he charmed me still more by his private conversation, than he had ever done in company. He was passionately fond of the beauties of nature; and I recollect once he told me, when I was admiring a distant prospect in

one

one of our morning walks, that the sight of so many smoking cottages gave a pleasure to his mind, which none could understand who had not witnessed, like himself, the happiness and the worth which they contained.

" In his political principles he was then a Jacobite; which was perhaps owing partly to this, that his father was originally from the estate of Lord Mareschall. Indeed he did not appear to have thought much on such subjects, nor very consistently. He had a very strong sense of religion, and expressed deep regret at the levity with which he had heard it treated occasionally in some convivial meetings which he frequented. I speak of him as he was in the winter of 1786-7; for afterwards we met but seldom, and our conversations turned chiefly on his literary projects, or his private affairs.

" I do not recollect whether it appears or not from any of your letters to me, that you had ever seen Burns.* If you have, it is superfluous for me to add, that the idea which his conversation conveyed of the powers of his mind, exceeded, if possible, that which is suggested by his writings. Among the poets whom I have happened to know, I have been struck, in more than one instance,

* The Editor has seen and conversed with Burns.

instance, with the unaccountable disparity between their general talents, and the occasional inspirations of their more favoured moments. But all the faculties of Burns's mind were, as far as I could judge, equally vigorous; and his predilection for poetry was rather the result of his own enthusiastic and impassioned temper, than of a genius exclusively adapted to that species of composition. From his conversation I should have pronounced him to be fitted to excel in whatever walk of ambition he had chosen to exert his abilities.

"Among the subjects on which he was accustomed to dwell, the characters of the individuals with whom he happened to meet, was plainly a favourite one. The remarks he made on them were always shrewd and pointed, though frequently inclining too much to sarcasm. His praise of those he loved was sometimes indiscriminate and extravagant; but this, I suspect, proceeded rather from the caprice and humour of the moment, than from the effects of attachment in blinding his judgment. His wit was ready, and always impressed with the marks of a vigorous understanding; but, to my taste, not often pleasing or happy. His attempts at epigram, in his printed works, are the only performances, perhaps, that he has produced, totally unworthy of his genius.

"In

" In summer, 1787, I passed some weeks in Ayrshire, and saw Burns occasionally. I think that he made a pretty long excursion that season to the Highlands, and that he also visited what Beattie calls the Arcadian ground of Scotland, upon the banks of the Tiviot and the Tweed.

" I should have mentioned before, that notwithstanding various reports I heard during the preceding winter, of Burns's predilection for convivial, and not very select society, I should have concluded in favour of his habits of sobriety, from all of him that ever fell under my own observation. He told me indeed himself, that the weakness of his stomach was such as to deprive him entirely of any merit in his temperance. I was however somewhat alarmed about the effect of his now comparatively sedentary and luxurious life, when he confessed to me, the first night he spent in my house after his winter's campaign in town, that he had been much disturbed when in bed, by a palpitation at his heart, which, he said, was a complaint to which he had of late become subject.

" In the course of the same season I was led by curiosity to attend for an hour or two a Mason-Lodge in Mauchline, where Burns presided. He had occasion to make some short unpremeditated compliments to different individuals from whom

whom he had no reason to expect a visit, and every thing he said was happily conceived, and forcibly as well as fluently expressed. If I am not mistaken, he told me, that in that village, before going to Edinburgh, he had belonged to a small club of such of the inhabitants as had a taste for books, when they used to converse and debate on any interesting questions that occurred to them in the course of their reading. His manner of speaking in public had evidently the marks of some practice in extempore elocution.

" I must not omit to mention, what I have always considered as characteristical in a high degree of true genius, the extreme facility and good-nature of his taste, in judging of the compositions of others, where there was any real ground for praise. I repeated to him many passages of English poetry with which he was unacquainted, and have more than once witnessed the tears of admiration and rapture with which he heard them. The collection of songs by Dr. Aikin, which I first put into his hands, he read with unmixed delight, notwithstanding his former efforts in that very difficult species of writing; and I have little doubt that it had some effect in polishing his subsequent compositions.

" In judging of prose, I do not think his taste

taste was equally sound. I once read to him a passage or two in Franklin's Works, which I thought very happily executed, upon the model of Addison; but he did not appear to relish, or to perceive the beauty which they derived from their exquisite simplicity, and spoke of them with indifference, when compared with the point, and antithesis, and quaintness of *Junius*. The influence of this taste is very perceptible in his own prose compositions, although their great and various excellences render some of them scarcely less objects of wonder than his poetical performances. The late Dr. Robertson used to say, that considering his education, the former seemed to him the more extraordinary of the two.

" His memory was uncommonly retentive, at least for poetry, of which he recited to me frequently long compositions with the most minute accuracy. They were chiefly ballads, and other pieces in our Scottish dialect; great part of them (he told me) he had learned in his childhood, from his mother, who delighted in such recitations, and whose poetical taste, rude as it probably was, gave, it is presumable, the first direction to her son's genius.

" Of the more polished verses which accidentally fell into his hands in his early years, he

he mentioned particularly the recommendatory poems, by different authors, prefixed to *Hervey's Meditations;* a book which has always had a very wide circulation among such of the country people of Scotland, as affect to unite some degree of taste with their religious studies. And these poems (although they are certainly below mediocrity) he continued to read with a degree of rapture beyond expression. He took notice of this fact himself, as a proof how much the taste is liable to be influenced by accidental circumstances.

" His father appeared to me from the account he gave of him, to have been a respectable and worthy character, possessed of a mind superior to what might have been expected from his station in life. He ascribed much of his own principles and feelings to the early impressions he had received from his instructions and example. I recollect that he once applied to *him* (and he added, that the passage was a literal statement of fact) the two last lines of the following passage in the *Minstrel;* the whole of which he repeated with great enthusiasm :

Shall I be left forgotten in the dust,
When fate, relenting, lets the flower revive;
Shall nature's voice, to man alone unjust,
Bid him, though doom'd to perish, hope to live?

Is

Is it for this fair virtue oft must strive,
With disappointment, penury, and pain?
No! Heaven's immortal spring shall yet arrive;
And man's majestic beauty bloom again,
Bright thro' th' eternal year of love's triumphant reign.

This truth sublime, his simple sire had taught:
In sooth, 'twas almost all the shepherd knew.

" With respect to Burns's early education, I cannot say any thing with certainty. He always spoke with respect and gratitude of the schoolmaster who had taught him to read English; and who, finding in his scholar a more than ordinary ardour for knowledge, had been at pains to instruct him in the grammatical principles of the language. He began the study of Latin, but dropped it before he had finished the verbs. I have sometimes heard him quote a few Latin words, such as *omnia vincit amor, &c.* but they seemed to be such as he had caught from conversation, and which he repeated by *rote.* I think he had a project, after he came to Edinburgh, of prosecuting the study under his intimate friend, the late Mr. Nichol, one of the masters of the grammar-school here; but I do not know that he ever proceeded so far as to make the attempt.

" He certainly possessed a smattering of

French; and, if he had an affectation in any thing, it was in introducing occasionally a word or phrase from that language. It is possible that his knowledge in this respect might be more extensive than I suppose it to be; but this you can learn from his more intimate acquaintance. It would be worth while to inquire, whether he was able to read the French authors with such facility as to receive from them any improvement to his taste. For my own part, I doubt it much—nor would I believe it, but on very strong and pointed evidence.

"If my memory does not fail me, he was well instructed in arithmetic, and knew something of practical geometry, particularly of surveying.—All his other attainments were entirely his own.

"The last time I saw him was during the winter, 1788-89;* when he passed an evening with me at Drumseugh, in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh, where I was then living. My friend Mr. Alison was the only other person in company. I never saw him more agreeable or interesting.

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* Or rather 1789-90. I cannot speak with confidence with respect to the particular year. Some of my other dates may possibly require correction, as I keep no journal of such occurrences.

interesting. A present which Mr. Alison sent him afterwards of his *Essays on Taste*, drew from Burns a letter of acknowledgment, which I remember to have read with some degree of surprise at the distinct conception, he appeared from it to have formed, of the general principles of the doctrine of *association*. When I saw Mr. Alison in Shropshire last autumn, I forgot to inquire if the letter be still in existence. If it is, you may easily procure it, by means of our friend Mr. Houlbrooke."*

* * * * * * * *

The scene that opened on our bard in Edinburgh was altogether new, and in a variety of other respects highly interesting, especially to one of his disposition of mind. To use an expression of his own, he found himself, "suddenly translated from the veriest shades of life," into the presence, and indeed, into the society of a number of persons, previously known to him by report as of the highest distinction in his country, and whose characters it was natural for him to examine with no common curiosity.

From the men of letters, in general, his reception was particularly flattering. The late

* This letter will be found, Vol. ii. p. 353.

Dr. Robertson, Dr. Blair, Dr. Gregory, Mr. Stewart, Mr. Mackenzie, and Mr. Frazer Tytler, may be mentioned in the list of those who perceived his uncommon talents, who acknowledged more especially his powers in conversation, and who interested themselves in the cultivation of his genius. In Edinburgh literary and fashionable society are a good deal mixed. Our bard was an acceptable guest in the gayest and most elevated circles, and frequently received from female beauty and elegance, those attentions above all others most grateful to him. At the table of Lord Monboddo he was a frequent guest; and while he enjoyed the society, and partook of the hospitalities of the venerable judge, he experienced the kindness and condescension of his lovely and accomplished daughter. The singular beauty of this young lady was illuminated by that happy expression of countenance which results from the union of cultivated taste and superior understanding, with the finest affections of the mind. The influence of such attractions was not unfelt by our poet. "There has not been any thing like "Miss Burnet," said he in a letter to a friend, "in all the combination of beauty, grace, and "goodness the Creator has formed, since Mil-"ton's Eve on the first day of her existence."*

In

* *See vol.* ii. *p.* 85.

In his *Address to Edinburgh*, she is celebrated in a strain of still greater elevation:

> " Fair Burnet strikes th' adoring eye,
> Heaven's beauties on my fancy shine;
> I see the Sire of Love on high,
> And own his work indeed divine!"*

This lovely woman died a few years afterwards in the flower of youth. Our bard expressed his sensibility on that occasion, in verses addressed to her memory.†

Among the men of rank and fashion, Burns was particularly distinguished by James Earl of Glencairn. On the motion of this nobleman, the *Caledonian Hunt*, an association of the principal of the nobility and gentry of Scotland, extended their patronage to our bard, and admitted him to their gay orgies. He repaid their notice by a dedication of the enlarged and improved edition of his poems, in which he has celebrated their patriotism and independence in very animated terms.

" I congratulate my country that the blood of her ancient heroes runs uncontaminated; and that, from your courage, knowledge, and public spirit, she may expect protection, wealth, and liberty.

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* *See vol.* iii. *p.* 232. † *See vol.* ii. *p.* 323.

liberty. * * * * * * * * * May corruption shrink at your kindling indignant glance; and may tyranny in the ruler, and licentiousness in the people, equally find in you an inexorable foe!"*

It is to be presumed that these generous sentiments, uttered at an æra singularly propitious to independence of character and conduct, were favourably received by the persons to whom they were addressed, and that they were echoed from every bosom, as well as from that of the Earl of Glencairn. This accomplished nobleman, a scholar, a man of taste and sensibility, died soon afterwards. Had he lived, and had his power equalled his wishes, Scotland might still have exulted in the genius, instead of lamenting the early fate of her favourite bard.

A taste for letters is not always conjoined with habits of temperance and regularity; and Edinburgh, at the period of which we speak, contained perhaps an uncommon proportion of men of considerable talents, devoted to social excesses, in which their talents were wasted and debased.

Burns

* *See vol.* iii. *Dedication.*

Burns entered into several parties of this description, with the usual vehemence of his character. His generous affections, his ardent eloquence, his brilliant and daring imagination, fitted him to be the idol of such associations; and accustoming himself to conversation of unlimited range, and to festive indulgences that scorned restraint, he gradually lost some portion of his relish for the more pure, but less poignant pleasures, to be found in the circles of taste, elegance, and literature. The sudden alteration in his habits of life operated on him physically as well as morally. The humble fare of an Ayrshire peasant he had exchanged for the luxuries of the Scottish metropolis, and the effects of this change on his ardent constitution could not be inconsiderable. But whatever influence might be produced on his conduct, his excellent understanding suffered no corresponding debasement. He estimated his friends and associates of every description at their proper value, and appreciated his own conduct with a precision that might give scope to much curious and melancholy reflection. He saw his danger, and at times formed resolutions to guard against it; but he had embarked on the tide of dissipation, and was borne along its stream.

Of the state of his mind at this time, an authentic, though imperfect, document remains, in a book

a book which he procured in the spring of 1787, for the purpose, as he himself informs us, of recording in it whatever seemed worthy of observation. The following extracts may serve as a specimen:

Edinburgh, April 9, 1787.

"As I have seen a good deal of human life in Edinburgh, a great many characters which are new to one bred up in the shades of life as I have been, I am determined to take down my remarks on the spot. Gray observes, in a letter to Mr. Palgrave, that, "half a word fixed, upon, or near the spot, is worth a cart-load of recollection." I don't know how it is with the world in general, but with me, making my remarks is by no means a solitary pleasure. I want some one to laugh with me, some one to be grave with me, some one to please me and help my discrimination, with his or her own remark, and at times, no doubt, to admire my acuteness, and penetration. The world are so busied with selfish pursuits, ambition, vanity, interest, or pleasure, that very few think it worth their while to make any observation on what passes around them, except where that observation is a sucker, or branch of the darling plant they are rearing in their fancy. Nor am I sure, notwithstanding all the sentimental flights of novel-writers, and the

the sage philosophy of moralists, whether we are capable of so intimate and cordial a coalition of friendship, as that one man may pour out his bosom, his every thought and floating fancy, his very inmost soul, with unreserved confidence to another, without hazard of losing part of that respect which man deserves from man; or, from the unavoidable imperfections attending human nature, of one day repenting his confidence.

"For these reasons I am determined to make these pages my confidant. I will sketch every character that any way strikes me, to the best of my power, with unshrinking justice. I will insert anecdotes, and take down remarks, in the old law phrase, *without feud or favour*.—Where I hit on any thing clever, my own applause will, in some measure, feast my vanity; and, begging Patroclus' and Achates' pardon, I think a lock and key a security, at least equal to the bosom of any friend whatever.

"My own private story likewise, my love-adventures, my rambles; the frowns and smiles of fortune on my bardship; my poems and fragments, that must never see the light, shall be occasionally inserted.—In short, never did four shillings purchase so much friendship, since confidence

confidence went first to market, or honesty was set up to sale.

" To these seemingly invidious, but too just ideas of human friendship, I would cheerfully make one exception—the connexion between two persons of different sexes, when their interests are united and absorbed by the tie of love—

When thought meets thought, ere from the lips it part,
And each warm wish springs mutual from the heart.

There confidence, confidence that exalts them the more in one another's opinion, that endears them the more to each other's hearts, unreservedly " reigns and revels." But this is not my lot; and, in my situation, if I am wise (which by the by I have no great chance of being), my fate should be cast with the Psalmist's sparrow, " to watch alone on the house-tops."—Oh, the pity!

* * * * * *

" There are few of the sore evils under the sun give me more uneasiness and chagrin than the comparison how a man of genius, nay, of avowed worth, is received every where, with the reception which a mere ordinary character, decorated

corated with the trappings and futile distinctions of fortune meets. I imagine a man of abilities, his breast glowing with honest pride, conscious that men are born equal, still giving *honour to whom honour is due;* he meets at a great man's table, a Squire something, or a Sir somebody; he knows the *noble* landlord, at heart, gives the bard, or whatever he is, a share of his good wishes, beyond, perhaps, any one at table; yet how will it mortify him to see a fellow, whose abilities would scarcely have made an *eightpenny tailor*, and whose heart is not worth three farthings, meet with attention and notice, that are withheld from the son of genius and poverty?

"The noble Glencairn has wounded me to the soul here, because I dearly esteem, respect, and love him. He shewed so much attention, engrossing attention, one day, to the only blockhead at table (the whole company consisted of his lordship, dunderpate, and myself), that I was within half a point of throwing down my gage of contemptuous defiance; but he shook my hand, and looked so benevolently good at parting. God bless him! though I should never see him more, I shall love him until my dying day! I am pleased to think I am so capable of the throes of gratitude, as I am miserably deficient in some other virtues.

"With

"With Dr. Blair I am more at my ease. I never respect him with humble veneration; but when he kindly interests himself in my welfare, or still more, when he descends from his pinnacle, and meets me on equal ground in conversation, my heart overflows with what is called *liking*. When he neglects me for the mere carcass of greatness, or when his eye measures the difference of our points of elevation, I say to myself with scarcely any emotion, what do I care for him, or his pomp either?"

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The intentions of the poet in procuring this book, so fully described by himself, were very imperfectly executed. He has inserted in it few or no incidents, but several observations and reflections, of which the greater part that are proper for the public eye, will be found interwoven in the volume of his letters. The most curious particulars in the book are the delineations of the characters he met with. These are not numerous; but they are chiefly of persons of distinction in the republic of letters, and nothing but the delicacy and respect due to living characters prevents us from committing them to the press. Though it appears that in his conversation he was sometimes disposed to sarcastic

sarcastic remarks on the men with whom he lived, nothing of this kind is discoverable in these more deliberate efforts of his understanding, which, while they exhibit great clearness of discrimination, manifest also the wish, as well as the power, to bestow high and generous praise.

As a specimen of these delineations, we give in this (fourth) edition, the character of Dr. Blair, who has now paid the debt of nature, in the full confidence that this freedom will not be found inconsistent with the respect and veneration due to that excellent man, the last star in the literary constellation, by which the metropolis of Scotland was, in the earlier part of the present reign so beautifully illuminated.

"IT is not easy forming an exact judgment of any one; but, in my opinion, Dr. Blair is merely an astonishing proof what industry and application can do. Natural parts like his are frequently to be met with; his vanity is proverbially known among his acquaintance; but he is justly at the head of what may be called fine writing; and a critic of the first, the very first, rank in prose; even in poetry, a bard of Nature's making can only take the *pas* of him. He has a heart, not of the very finest water, but far from being an ordinary one. In short,

short, he is truly a worthy, and most respectable character."

By the new edition of his poems, Burns acquired a sum of money that enabled him not only to partake of the pleasures of Edinburgh, but to gratify a desire he had long entertained, of visiting those parts of his native country, most attractive by their beauty or their grandeur; a desire which the return of summer naturally revived. The scenery on the banks of the Tweed, and of its tributary streams, strongly interested his fancy; and accordingly he left Edinburgh on the 6th of May, 1787, on a tour through a country so much celebrated in the rural songs of Scotland. He travelled on horseback, and was accompanied, during some part of his journey, by Mr. Ainslie, now writer to the signet, a gentleman who enjoyed much of his friendship and of his confidence. Of this tour a journal remains, which however contains only occasional remarks on the scenery, and which is chiefly occupied with an account of the author's different stages, and with his observations on the various characters to whom he was introduced. In the course of this tour he visited Mr. Ainslie of Berrywell, the father of his companion; Mr. Brydone, the celebrated traveller, to whom he carried a letter of introduction from Mr. Mackenzie;

kenzie; the Rev. Dr. Somerville of Jedburgh, the historian; Mr. and Mrs. Scott of Wauchope; Dr. Elliot, a physician, retired to a romantic spot on the banks of the Roole; Sir Alexander Don; Sir James Hall of Dunglass; and a great variety of other respectable characters. Every where the fame of the poet had spread before him, and every where he received the most hospitable and flattering attentions. At Jedburgh he continued several days, and was honoured by the magistrates with the freedom of their borough. The following may serve as a specimen of this tour, which the perpetual reference to living characters prevents our giving at large.

"*Saturday, May 6th.* Left Edinburgh—Lammer-muir-hills, miserably dreary in general, but at times very picturesque.

"Lanson-edge, a glorious view of the Merse. Reach Berrywell. * * * The family-meeting with my *compagnon de voyage*, very charming; particularly the sister. * * *

"*Sunday.* Went to church at Dunse. Heard Dr. Bowmaker. * * *

"*Monday.* Coldstream—glorious river Tweed—clear and majestic—fine bridge—dine at Coldstream

stream with Mr. Ainslie and Mr. Foreman. Beat Mr. Foreman in a dispute about Voltaire. Drink tea at Lenel-House with Mr. and Mrs. Brydone. * * * Reception extremely flattering. Sleep at Coldstream.

"*Tuesday.* Breakfast at Kelso—charming situation of the town—fine bridge over the Tweed. Enchanting views and prospects on both sides of the river, especially on the Scotch side. * * * Visit Roxburgh Palace—fine situation of it. Ruins of Roxburgh Castle—a Holly-bush growing where James the Second was accidentally killed by the bursting of a cannon. A small old religious ruin, and a fine old garden planted by the religious, rooted out and destroyed by a Hottentot, *a maitre d' hotel* of the Duke's!—Climate and soil of Berwickshire and even Roxburghshire, superior to Ayrshire—bad roads—turnip and sheep husbandry, their great improvements. * * * Low markets, consequently low lands—magnificence of farmers and farm-houses. Come up the Tiviot, and up the Jed to Jedburgh to lie, and so wish myself good night.

"*Wednesday.* Breakfast with Mr. Fair. * * * Charming romantic situation of Jedburgh, with gardens and orchards, intermingled among the houses

houses and the ruins of a once magnificent cathedral. All the towns here have the appearance of old rude grandeur, but extremely idle. —Jed, a fine romantic little river. Dined with Capt. Rutherford, * * * return to Jedburgh. Walk up the Jed with some ladies to be shewn Love-lane, and Blackburn, two fairy scenes. Introduced to Mr. Potts, writer, and to Mr. Sommerville, the clergyman of the parish, a man, and a gentleman, but sadly addicted to punning.

* * * * * * *

" *Jedburgh, Saturday.* Was presented by the magistrates with the freedom of the town.

" Took farewell of Jedburgh with some melancholy sensations.

" *Monday, May* 14*th, Kelso.* Dine with the farmers' club—all gentlemen talking of high matters—each of them keeps a hunter from 30l. to 50l. value, and attends the fox-hunting club in the country. Go out with Mr. Ker, one of the club, and a friend of Mr. Ainslie's, to sleep. In his mind and manners, Mr. Ker is astonishingly like my dear old friend Robert Muir—Every thing in his house elegant. He offers to accompany me in my English tour.

"*Tuesday.* Dine with Sir Alexander Don; a very wet day. * * * Sleep at Mr. Ker's again, and set out next day for Melross—visit Dryburgh, a fine old ruined abbey, by the way. Cross the Leader, and come up the Tweed to Melross. Dine there, and visit that far-famed glorious ruin—Come to Selkirk up the banks of Ettrick. The whole country hereabouts, both on Tweed and Ettrick, remarkably stony."

* * * * * * *

Having spent three weeks in exploring this interesting scenery, Burns crossed over into Northumberland. Mr. Ker, and Mr. Hood, two gentlemen with whom he had become acquainted in the course of his tour, accompanied him. He visited Alnwick-Castle, the princely seat of the Duke of Northumberland; the hermitage and old castle of Warksworth; Morpeth, and Newcastle.—In this last town he spent two days, and then proceeded to the south-west by Hexham and Wardrue, to Carlisle.—After spending a day at Carlisle with his friend Mr. Mitchel, he returned into Scotland, and at Annan his journal terminates abruptly.

Of the various persons with whom he became acquainted in the course of this journey, he has, in general, given some account; and almost always a favourable one. That on the banks of the

the Tweed, and of the Tiviot, our bard should find nymphs that were beautiful, is what might be confidently presumed. Two of these are particularly described in his journal. But it does not appear that the scenery, or its inhabitants, produced any effort of his muse, as was to have been wished and expected. From Annan, Burns proceeded to Dumfries, and thence through Sanquhar, to Mossgiel, near Mauchline, in Ayrshire, where he arrived about the 8th of June, 1787, after a long absence of six busy and eventful months. It will easily be conceived with what pleasure and pride he was received by his mother, his brothers, and sisters. He had left them poor, and comparatively friendless; he returned to them high in public estimation, and easy in his circumstances. He returned to them unchanged in his ardent affections, and ready to share with them to the uttermost farthing, the pittance that fortune had bestowed.

Having remained with them a few days, he proceeded again to Edinburgh, and immediately set out on a journey to the Highlands. Of this tour no particulars have been found among his manuscripts. A letter to his friend Mr. Ainslie, dated *Arrachas, near Crochairbas, by Lochleary, June* 28, 1787; commences as follows:

" I write you this on my tour through a country where savage streams tumble over sa-

vage mountains, thinly overspread with savage flocks, which starvingly support as savage inhabitants. My last stage was Inverary—to-morrow night's stage, Dumbarton. I ought sooner to have answered your kind letter, but you know I am a man of many sins."

Part of a letter from our Bard to a friend, giving some account of his journey, has been communicated to the Editor since the publication of the last edition. The reader will be amused with the following extract:

"ON our return, at a Highland gentleman's hospitable mansion, we fell in with a merry party, and danced till the ladies left us, at three in the morning. Our dancing was none of the French or English insipid formal movements; the ladies sung Scotch songs like angels, at intervals; then we flew at *Bab at the bowster*, *Tullochgorum*, *Loch Erroch side*,* &c. like midges sporting in the mottie sun, or craws prognosticating a storm in a hairst day.—When the dear lasses left us, we ranged round the bowl till the good-fellow hour of six; except a few minutes that we went out to pay our devotions to the glorious lamp of day peering over the towering top of Benlomond. We all kneeled; our

* Scotch tunes.

our worthy landlord's son held the bowl; each man a full glass in his hand; and I, as priest, repeated some rhyming nonsense, like Thomas-a-Rhymer's prophecies I suppose.—After a small refreshment of the gifts of Somnus, we proceeded to spend the day on Lochlomond, and reach Dumbarton in the evening. We dined at another good fellow's house, and consequently push'd the bottle; when we went out to mount our horses, we found ourselves "No vera fou but gaylie yet." My two friends and I rode soberly down the Loch side, till by came a Highlandman at the gallop, on a tolerably good horse, but which had never known the ornaments of iron or leather. We scorned to be out-galloped by a Highlandman, so off we started, whip and spur. My companions, though seemingly gayly mounted, fell sadly astern; but my old mare, Jenny Geddes, one of the Rosinante family, she strained past the Highlandman in spite of all his efforts, with the hair-halter: just as I was passing him, Donald wheeled his horse, as if to cross before me to mar my progress, when down came his horse, and threw his rider's breekless a—e in a clipt hedge; and down came Jenny Geddes over all, and my bardship between her and the Highlandman's horse. Jenny Geddes trode over me with such cautious reverence, that matters were not so bad as might well have been expected; so I came off with a few

few cuts and bruises, and a thorough resolution to be a pattern of sobriety for the future.

" I have yet fixed on nothing with respect to the serious business of life. I am, just as usual, a rhyming, mason-making, raking, aimless, idle fellow. However, I shall somewhere have a farm soon. I was going to say, a wife too; but that must never be my blessed lot. I am but a younger son of the house of Parnassus, and like other younger sons of great families, I may intrigue, if I choose to run all risks, but must not marry.

" I am afraid I have almost ruined one source, the principal one indeed, of my former happiness; that eternal propensity I always had to fall in love. My heart no more glows with feverish rapture. I have no paradisical evening interviews stolen from the restless cares and prying inhabitants of this weary world. I have only * * * *. This last is one of your distant acquaintances, has a fine figure, and elegant manners; and in the train of some great folks whom you know, has seen the politest quarters in Europe. I do like her a good deal; but what piques me is her conduct at the commencement of our acquaintance. I frequently visited her when I was in ———, and after passing regularly the intermediate degrees between the distant

distant formal bow and the familiar grasp round the waist, I ventured in my careless way to talk of friendship in rather ambiguous terms; and after her return to ———, I wrote to her in the same style. Miss, construing my words farther I suppose than even I intended, flew off in a tangent of female dignity and reserve, like a mountain lark in an April morning; and wrote me an answer which measured me out very completely what an immense way I had to travel before I could reach the climate of her favour. But I am an old hawk at the sport; and wrote her such a cool, deliberate, prudent reply, as brought my bird from her aerial towerings, pop, down at my foot like corporal Trim's hat.

"As for the rest of my acts, and my wars, and all my wise sayings, and why my mare was called Jenny Geddes; they shall be recorded in a few weeks hence at Linlithgow, in the chronicles of your memory, by

"ROBERT BURNS."

From this journey Burns returned to his friends in Ayrshire, with whom he spent the month of July, renewing his friendships, and extending his acquaintance throughout the county, where he was now very generally known and admired. In August he again visited Edinburgh, whence he undertook another journey towards the middle of this

this month, in company with Mr. M. Adair, now Dr. Adair, of Harrowgate, of which this gentleman has favoured us with the following account:

"Burns and I left Edinburgh together in August, 1787. We rode by Linlithgow and Carron, to Stirling. We visited the iron-works at Carron, with which the poet was forcibly struck. The resemblance between that place, and its inhabitants, to the cave of the Cyclops, which must have occurred to every classical reader, presented itself to Burns. At Stirling the prospects from the castle strongly interested him; in a former visit to which, his national feelings had been powerfully excited by the ruinous and roofless state of the hall in which the Scottish parliaments had frequently been held. His indignation had vented itself in some imprudent, but not unpoetical lines, which had given much offence, and which he took this opportunity of erasing, by breaking the pane of the window at the inn on which they were written.

"At Stirling we met with a company of travellers from Edinburgh, among whom was a character in many respects congenial with that of Burns. This was Nicol, one of the teachers of the High Grammar-School at Edinburgh—the same wit and power of conversation; the same fondness for convivial society, and thoughtlessness

ness of to-morrow, characterized both. Jacobitical principles in politics were common to both of them; and these have been suspected, since the revolution of France, to have given place in each, to opinions apparently opposite. I regret that I have preserved no *memorabilia* of their conversation, either on this or on other occasions, when I happened to meet them together. Many songs were sung; which I mention for the sake of observing, that when Burns was called on in his turn, he was accustomed, instead of singing, to recite one or other of his own shorter poems, with a tone and emphasis, which though not correct or harmonious, were impressive and pathetic. This he did on the present occasion.

"From Stirling we went next morning through the romantic and fertile vale of Devon to Harvieston, in Clackmannanshire, then inhabited by Mrs. Hamilton, with the younger part of whose family Burns had been previously acquainted. He introduced me to the family, and there was formed my first acquaintance with Mrs. Hamilton's eldest daughter, to whom I have been married for nine years. Thus was I indebted to Burns for a connexion from which I have derived, and expect further to derive, much happiness.

"During a residence of about ten days at Harvieston, we made excursions to visit various parts

parts of the surrounding scenery, inferior to none in Scotland, in beauty, sublimity, and romantic interest; particularly Castle Campbell, the ancient seat of the family of Argyle; and the famous cataract of the Devon, called the *Caldron Linn*; and the *Rumbling Bridge*, a single broad arch, thrown by the Devil, if tradition is to be believed, across the river, at about the height of a hundred feet above its bed. I am surprised that none of these scenes should have called forth an exertion of Burns's muse. But I doubt if he had much taste for the picturesque. I well remember, that the ladies at Harvieston, who accompanied us on this jaunt, expressed their disappointment at his not expressing in more glowing and fervid language, his impressions of the *Caldron Linn* scene, certainly highly sublime, and somewhat horrible.

" A visit to Mrs. Bruce of Clackmannan, a lady above ninety, the lineal descendant of that race which gave the Scottish throne its brightest ornament, interested his feelings more powerfully. This venerable dame, with characteristical dignity, informed me, on my observing that I believed she was descended from the family of Robert Bruce, that Robert Bruce was sprung from her family. Though almost deprived of speech by a paralytic affection, she preserved her hospitality and urbanity. She was in possession of the hero's

hero's helmet and two-handed sword, with which she conferred on Burns and myself the honour of knighthood, remarking, that she had a better right to confer that title than *some people.* * * You will of course conclude that the old lady's political tenets were as Jacobitical as the poet's, a conformity which contributed not a little to the cordiality of our reception and entertainment.—She gave as her first toast after dinner, *Awa' Uncos,* or Away with the Strangers—Who these strangers were, you will readily understand. Mrs. A. corrects me by saying it should be *Hooi,* or *Hoohi uncos,* a sound used by shepherds to direct their dogs to drive away the sheep.

" We returned to Edinburgh by Kinross (on the shore of Lochleven) and Queen's ferry. I am inclined to think Burns knew nothing of poor Michael Bruce, who was then alive at Kinross, or had died there a short while before. A meeting between the bards, or a visit to the deserted cottage and early grave of poor Bruce, would have been highly interesting.*

" At Dumfermline we visited the ruined abbey, and the abbey-church, now consecrated to Presbyterian worship. Here I mounted the *cutty stool,* or stool of repentance, assuming the character

* Bruce died some years before. E.

racter of a penitent for fornication; while Burns from the pulpit addressed to me a ludicrous reproof and exhortation, parodied from that which had been delivered to himself in Ayrshire, where he had, as he assured me, once been one of seven who mounted the *seat of shame* together.

" In the church-yard two broad flag-stones marked the grave of Robert Bruce, for whose memory Burns had more than common veneration. He knelt and kissed the stone with sacred fervour, and heartily *(suus ut mos erat)* execrated the worse than Gothic neglect of the first of Scottish heroes."*

The surprise expressed by Dr. Adair, in his excellent letter, that the romantic scenery of the Devon should have failed to call forth any exertion of the poet's muse, is not in its nature singular; and the disappointment felt at his not expressing in more glowing language his emotions on the sight of the famous cataract of that river, is similar to what was felt by the friends of Burns on other occasions of the same nature. Yet the inference that Dr. Adair seems inclined to draw from it, that he had little taste for the picturesque, might be questioned, even if it stood

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* Extracted from a letter of Dr. Adair to the Editor.

stood uncontroverted by other evidence. The muse of Burns was in a high degree capricious; she came uncalled, and often refused to attend at his bidding. Of all the numerous subjects suggested to him by his friends and correspondents, there is scarcely one that he adopted. The very expectation that a particular occasion would excite the energies of fancy, if communicated to Burns, seemed in him, as in other poets, destructive of the effect expected. Hence perhaps may be explained, why the banks of the Devon and of the Tweed form no part of the subjects of his song.

A similar train of reasoning may perhaps explain the want of emotion with which he viewed the *Caldron Linn*. Certainly there are no affections of the mind more deadened by the influence of previous expectation, than those arising from the sight of natural objects, and more especially of objects of grandeur. Minute descriptions of scenes, of a sublime nature, should never be given to those who are about to view them, particularly if they are persons of great strength and sensibility of imagination. Language seldom or never conveys an adequate idea of such objects, but in the mind of a great poet it may excite a picture that far transcends them. The imagination of Burns might form a cataract, in comparison with which the *Caldron Linn* should seem

seem the purling of a rill, and even the mighty falls of Niagara, a humble cascade.*

Whether these suggestions may assist in explaining our Bard's deficiency of impression on the occasion referred to, or whether it ought rather to be imputed to some pre-occupation, or indisposition of mind, we presume not to decide; but that he was in general feelingly alive to the beautiful or sublime in scenery, may be supported by irresistible evidence. It is true this pleasure was greatly heightened in his mind, as might be expected, when combined with moral emotions of

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* This reasoning might be extended, with some modifications, to objects of sight of every kind. To have formed before-hand a distinct picture in the mind of any interesting person or thing, generally lessens the pleasure of the first meeting with them. Though this picture be not superior, or even equal to the reality, still it can never be expected to be an exact resemblance; and the disappointment felt at finding the object something different from what was expected, interrupts and diminishes the emotions that would otherwise be produced. In such cases the second or third interview gives more pleasure than the first.—*See the Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, by *Mr. Stewart*, *p.* 484. Such publications as *The Guide to the Lakes*, where every scene is described in the most minute manner, and sometimes with considerable exaggeration of language, are in this point of view objectionable.

of a kind with which it happily unites. That under this association Burns contemplated the scenery of the Devon with the eye of a genuine poet, the following lines written at this very period, may bear witness.

On a Young Lady, residing on the banks of the small river Devon, in Clackmannanshire, but whose infant years were spent in Ayrshire.

How pleasant the banks of the clear-winding Devon,
With green-spreading bushes, and flowers blooming fair;
But the bonniest flower on the banks of the Devon
Was once a sweet bud on the braes of the Ayr.

Mild be the sun on this sweet blushing flower,
In the gay rosy morn as it bathes in the dew!
And gentle the fall of the soft vernal shower,
That steals on the evening each leaf to renew.

O spare the dear blossom, ye orient breezes,
With chill hoary wing as ye usher the dawn!
And far be thou distant, thou reptile that seizes
The verdure and pride of the garden and lawn!

Let Bourbon exult in his gay gilded lilies,
And England triumphant display her proud rose;
A fairer than either adorns the green valleys
Where Devon, sweet Devon, meandering flows.

The different journeys already mentioned did not satisfy the curiosity of Burns. About the beginning of September, he again set out from

from Edinburgh on a more extended tour to the Highlands, in company with Mr. Nicol, with whom he had now contracted a particular intimacy, which lasted during the remainder of his life. Mr. Nicol was of Dumfries-shire, of a descent equally humble with our poet. Like him he rose by the strength of his talents, and fell by the strength of his passions. He died in the summer of 1797. Having received the elements of a classical instruction at his parish school, Mr. Nicol made a very rapid and singular proficiency; and by early undertaking the office of an instructor himself, he acquired the means of entering himself at the University of Edinburgh. There he was first a student of theology, then a student of medicine, and was afterwards employed in the assistance and instruction of graduates in medicine, in those parts of their exercises in which the Latin language is employed. In this situation he was the contemporary and rival of the celebrated Dr. Brown, whom he resembled in the particulars of his history, as well as in the leading features of his character. The office of assistant-teacher in the High-school being vacant, it was, as usual, filled up by competition; and in the face of some prejudices, and perhaps of some well-founded objections, Mr. Nicol, by superior learning, carried it from all the other candidates. This office he filled at the period of which we speak.

It

It is to be lamented, that an acquaintance with the writers of Greece and Rome does not always supply an original want of taste and correctness in manners and conduct; and where it fails of this effect, it sometimes inflames the native pride of temper, which treats with disdain those delicacies in which it has not learnt to excel. It was thus with the fellow-traveller of Burns. Formed by nature in a model of great strength, neither his person nor his manners had any tincture of taste or elegance; and his coarseness was not compensated by that romantic sensibility, and those towering flights of imagination, which distinguished the conversation of Burns, in the blaze of whose genius all the deficiencies of his manners were absorbed and disappeared.

Mr. Nicol and our poet travelled in a post-chaise, which they engaged for the journey, and passing through the heart of the Highlands, stretched northwards, about ten miles beyond Inverness. There they bent their course eastward, across the island, and returned by the shore of the German sea to Edinburgh. In the course of this tour, some particulars of which will be found in a letter of our bard, *vol.* ii. *p.* 89, they visited a number of remarkable scenes, and the imagination of Burns was constantly excited by the wild and sublime scenery

through which he passed. Of this several proofs may be found in the poems formerly printed.* Of the history of one of these poems, *The Humble Petition of Bruar Water (vol.* iii. *p.* 353), and of the bard's visit to Athole-house, some particulars will be found in *vol.* ii. *No.* 29; and by the favour of Mr. Walker of Perth, then residing in the family of the Duke of Athole, we are enabled to give the following additional account.

"ON reaching Blair, he sent me notice of his arrival (as I had been previously acquainted with him), and I hastened to meet him at the inn. The Duke, to whom he brought a letter of introduction, was from home; but the Duchess, being informed of his arrival, gave him an invitation to sup and sleep at Athole-house. He accepted the invitation; but, as the hour of supper was at some distance, begged I would in the interval be his guide through the grounds. It was already growing dark; yet the softened, though

* See vol. iii. *Lines on seeing some water-fowl in Loch-Turit, a wild scene among the hills of Ochtertyre, p.* 358. *Lines written with a Pencil over the Chimney-piece, in the Inn at Kenmore Taymouth, p.* 361. *Lines written with a pencil standing by the fall of Fyers, near Lochness, p.* 363.

though faint and uncertain, view of their beauties, which the moonlight afforded us, seemed exactly suited to the state of his feelings at the time. I had often, like others, experienced the pleasures which arise from the sublime or elegant landscape, but I never saw those feelings so intense as in Burns. When we reached a rustic hut on the river Tilt, where it is overhung by a woody precipice, from which there is a noble water-fall, he threw himself on the heathy seat, and gave himself up to a tender, abstracted, and voluptuous enthusiasm of imagination. I cannot help thinking it might have been here that he conceived the idea of the following lines, which he afterwards introduced into his poem on *Bruar Water*, when only fancying such a combination of objects as were now present to his eye.

Or, by the reaper's nightly beam,
Mild, chequering thro' the trees,
Rave to my darkly-dashing stream,
Hoarse-swelling on the breeze.

" It was with much difficulty I prevailed on him to quit this spot, and to be introduced in proper time to supper.

" My curiosity was great to see how he would conduct himself in company so different

from what he had been accustomed to.* His manner was unembarrassed, plain, and firm. He appeared to have complete reliance on his own native good sense for directing his behaviour. He seemed at once to perceive and to appreciate what was due to the company and to himself, and never to forget a proper respect for the separate species of dignity belonging to each. He did not arrogate conversation, but, when led into it, he spoke with ease, propriety and manliness. He tried to exert his abilities, because he knew it was ability alone gave him a title to be there. The Duke's fine young family attracted much of his admiration; he drank their healths as *honest men and bonnie lasses*, an idea which was much applauded by the company, and with which he has very felicitously closed his poem.†

" Next day I took a ride with him through some of the most romantic parts of that neighbourhood, and was highly gratified by his conversation. As a specimen of his happiness of conception and strength of expression, I will mention a remark which he made on his fellow-traveller,

* In the preceding winter, Burns had been in company of the highest rank in Edinburgh; but this description of his manners is perfectly applicable to his first appearance in such society. E.

† *See vol.* iii. *p.* 357.

traveller, who was walking at the time a few paces before us. He was a man of a robust but clumsy person; and while Burns was expressing to me the value he entertained for him, on account of his vigorous talents, although they were clouded at times by coarseness of manners; "in short," he added, "his mind is like his body, he has a confounded strong in-knee'd sort of a soul.

"Much attention was paid to Burns both before and after the Duke's return, of which he was perfectly sensible, without being vain; and at his departure I recommended to him, as the most appropriate return he could make, to write some descriptive verses on any of the scenes with which he had been so much delighted. After leaving Blair, he, by the Duke's advice, visited the *Falls of Bruar*, and in a few days I received a letter from Inverness, with the verses enclosed."*

It appears that the impression made by our poet on the noble family of Athole, was in a high degree favourable; it is certain he was charmed

* Extract of a letter from Mr. Walker to Mr. Cunningham, dated *Perth, 24th Oct.* 1797.

The letter mentioned as written to Mr. Walker by Mr. Burns, will be found in *vol.* ii. *p.* 87.

charmed with the reception he received from them, and he often mentioned the two days he spent at Athole-house as among the happiest of his life. He was warmly invited to prolong his stay, but sacrificed his inclinations to his engagement with Mr. Nicol; which is the more to be regretted, as he would otherwise have been introduced to Mr. Dundas (then daily expected on a visit to the Duke), a circumstance that might have had a favourable influence on Burns's future fortunes. At Athole-house he met, for the first time, Mr. Graham, of Fintry, to whom he was afterwards indebted for his office in the excise.

The letters and poems which he addressed to Mr. Graham, bear testimony of his sensibility, and justify the supposition, that he would not have been deficient in gratitude had he been elevated to a situation better suited to his disposition and to his talents.*

A few days after leaving Blair of Athole, our poet and his fellow-traveller arrived at Fochabers. In the course of the preceding winter Burns had been introduced to the Duchess of Gordon at Edinburgh,

* See the first *Epistle to Mr. Graham*, soliciting an employment in the Excise, *vol.* ii. *p.* 171; and his second Epistle, *vol.* iii. *p.* 315.

Edinburgh, and presuming on this acquaintance, he proceeded to Gordon-Castle, leaving Mr. Nicol at the inn in the village. At the castle our poet was received with the utmost hospitality and kindness, and the family being about to sit down to dinner, he was invited to take his place at table as a matter of course. This invitation he accepted, and after drinking a few glasses of wine, he rose up, and proposed to withdraw. On being pressed to stay, he mentioned, for the first time, his engagement with his fellow-traveller; and his noble host offering to send a servant to conduct Mr. Nicol to the castle, Burns insisted on undertaking that office himself. He was, however, accompanied by a gentleman, a particular acquaintance of the Duke, by whom the invitation was delivered in all the forms of politeness. The invitation came too late; the pride of Nicol was inflamed into a high degree of passion, by the neglect which he had already suffered. He had ordered the horses to be put to the carriage, being determined to proceed on his journey alone; and they found him parading the streets of Fochabers, before the door of the inn, venting his anger on the postillion, for the slowness with which he obeyed his commands. As no explanation nor entreaty could change the purpose of his fellow-traveller, our poet was reduced to the necessity of separating from him entirely, or of instantly proceeding

proceeding with him on their journey. He chose the last of these alternatives; and seating himself beside Nicol in the post-chaise, with mortification and regret, he turned his back on Gordon-castle, where he had promised himself some happy days. Sensible, however, of the great kindness of the noble family, he made the best return in his power, by the following poem.*

I.

Streams that glide in orient plains,
Never bound by winter's chains;
Glowing here on golden sands,
There commix'd with foulest stains
From tyranny's empurpled bands:
These, their richly gleaming waves,
I leave to tyrants and their slaves;
Give me the stream that sweetly laves
The banks by Castle-Gordon.

II.

Spicy forests, ever gay,
Shading from the burning ray
Hapless wretches sold to toil,
Or the ruthless native's way,
Bent on slaughter, blood, and spoil:
Woods that ever verdant wave,
I leave the tyrant and the slave,
Give me the groves that lofty brave
The storms, by Castle-Gordon.

III.

* This information is extracted from a letter of Dr. Couper of Fochabers to the Editor.

III.

Wildly here without control,
Nature reigns and rules the whole;
In that sober pensive mood,
Dearest to the feeling soul,
She plants the forest, pours the flood;
Life's poor day I'll musing rave,
And find at night a sheltering cave,
Where waters flow and wild woods wave,
By bonnie Castle-Gordon.*

Burns remained at Edinburgh during the greater part of the winter, 1787-8, and again entered into the society and dissipation of that metropolis. It appears that on the 31st day of December, he attended a meeting to celebrate the birth-day of the lineal descendant of the Scottish race of Kings, the late unfortunate Prince Charles-Edward. Whatever might have been the wish or purpose of the original institutors of this annual meeting, there is no reason to suppose that the gentlemen of whom it was at this time composed, were not perfectly loyal to the King on the throne. It is not to be conceived that they entertained any hope of, any wish for, the restoration of the House of Stuart; but, over their sparkling wine, they indulged the

* These verses our poet composed to be sung to *Morag*, a Highland air of which he was extremely fond.

the generous feelings which the recollection of fallen greatness is calculated to inspire; and commemorated the heroic valour which strove to sustain it in vain—valour worthy of a nobler cause and of a happier fortune. On this occasion our bard took upon himself the office of poet-laureate, and produced an ode, which though deficient in the complicated rhythm and polished versification that such compositions require, might on a fair competition, where energy of feelings and of expression were alone in question, have won the butt of Malmsey from the real laureate of that day.

The following extracts may serve as a specimen:

* * * * * * *
* * * * * * *

False flatterer, Hope, away!
Nor think to lure us as in days of yore:
We solemnize this sorrowing natal day,
To prove our loyal truth—we can no more;
And owning Heaven's mysterious sway,
Submissive, low, adore.

II.

Ye honoured mighty dead!
Who nobly perish'd in the glorious cause,
Your King, your country, and her laws!
From great Dundee, who smiling victory led,
And fell a martyr in her arms,
(What breast of northern ice but warms?)

To

To bold Balmerino's undying name,
Whose soul of fire, lighted at heav'n's high flame,
Deserves the proudest wreath departed heroes claim.*

III.

Not unreveng'd your fate shall be,
It only lags the fatal hour;
Your blood shall with incessant cry
Awake at last th' unsparing power.
As from the cliff, with thundering course,
The snowy ruin smokes along,
With doubling speed and gathering force,
Till deep it crashing whelms the cottage in the vale;
So vengeance * * *

In relating the incidents of our poet's life in Edinburgh, we ought to have mentioned the sentiments of respect and sympathy with which he traced out the grave of his predecessor Fergusson, over whose ashes, in the Canongate church-yard, he obtained leave to erect an humble monument, which will be viewed by reflecting

* In the first part of this ode there is some beautiful imagery, which the poet afterwards interwove in a happier manner, in the *Chevalier's Lament*, (*See vol.* ii. *p.* 135.) But if there were no other reasons for omitting to print the entire poem, the want of originality would be sufficient. A considerable part of it is a kind of rant, for which indeed precedent may be cited in various other birth-day odes, but with which it is impossible to go along.

flecting minds with no common interest, and which will awake, in the bosom of kindred genius, many a high emotion.* Neither should we pass over the continued friendship he experienced from a poet then living, the amiable and accomplished Blacklock.—To his encouraging advice it was owing (as has already appeared) that Burns, instead of emigrating to the West Indies, repaired to Edinburgh. He received him there with all the ardour of affectionate admiration; he eagerly introduced him to the respectable circle of his friends; he consulted his interest; he blazoned his fame; he lavished upon him all the kindness of a generous and feeling heart, into which nothing selfish or envious ever found admittance. Among the friends to whom he introduced Burns was Mr. Ramsay of Ochtertyre, to whom our poet paid a visit in the autumn of 1787, at his delightful retirement in the neighbourhood of Stirling, and on the banks of the Teith. Of this visit we have the following particulars:

"I have been in the company of many men of genius," says Mr. Ramsay, "some of them poets, but never witnessed such flashes of intellectual brightness as from him, the impulse of the

* *See vol.* ii. *p.* 60—63, where the Epitaph will be found, &c.

the moment, sparks of celestial fire! I never was more delighted, therefore, than with his company for two days, tête-a-tête. In a mixed company I should have made little of him; for, in the gamester's phrase, he did not always know when to play off and when to play on. * * * I not only proposed to him the writing of a play similar to the *Gentle Shepherd*, *qualem decet esse sororem*, but *Scottish Georgics*, a subject which Thomson has by no means exhausted in his Seasons. What beautiful landscapes of rural life and manners might not have been expected from a pencil so faithful and forcible as his, which could have exhibited scenes as familiar and interesting as those in the *Gentle Shepherd*, which every one who knows our swains in their unadulterated state, instantly recognises as true to nature. But to have executed either of these plans, steadiness and abstraction from company were wanting, not talents. When I asked him whether the Edinburgh Literati had mended his poems by their criticisms, "Sir," said he, "these gentlemen remind me of some spinsters in my country, who spin their thread so fine that it is neither fit for weft nor woof." He said he had not changed a word except one, to please Dr. Blair.*

Having

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* *Extract of a letter from Mr. Ramsay to the Editor.* "This incorrigibility of Burns extended, however, only to his

Having settled with his publisher, Mr. Creech, in February, 1788, Burns found himself master of nearly five hundred pounds, after discharging all his expenses. Two hundred pounds he immediately advanced to his brother Gilbert, who had taken upon himself the support of their aged mother, and was struggling with many difficulties in the farm of Mossgiel. With the remainder of this sum, and some farther eventual profits from his poems, he determined on settling himself for life in the occupation of agriculture, and took from Mr. Miller, of Dalswinton, the farm of Ellisland, on the banks of the river Nith, six miles above Dumfries, on which he entered at Whitsunday, 1788. Having been previously recommended to the Board of Excise, his name had been put on the list of candidates for the humble office of a gauger or exciseman; and he immediately applied to acquiring the information necessary for filling that office, when the honourable Board might judge it proper to employ him. He expected to be called into service in the district in which his farm was situated, and vainly hoped to unite with success the labours of

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his poems printed before he arrived in Edinburgh; for, in regard to his unpublished poems, he was amenable to criticism, of which many proofs might be given." See some remarks on this subject, *vol.* iii. *Appendix, p.* 388. E.

of the farmer with the duties of the excise-man.

When Burns had in this manner arranged his plans for futurity, his generous heart turned to the object of his most ardent attachment, and listening to no considerations but those of honour and affection, he joined with her in a public declaration of marriage, thus legalizing their union, and rendering it permanent for life.*

Before Burns was known in Edinburgh, a specimen of his poetry had recommended him to Mr. Miller of Dalswinton. Understanding that he intended to resume the life of a farmer, Mr. Miller had invited him, in the spring of 1787, to view his estate in Nithsdale, offering him at the same time the choice of any of his farms out of lease, at such a rent as Burns and his friends might judge proper. It was not in the nature of Burns to take an undue advantage of the liberality of Mr. Miller. He proceeded in this business, however, with more than usual deliberation. Having made choice of the farm of Ellisland, he employed two of his friends, skilled in the value of land, to examine it, and with their approbation offered a rent to Mr. Miller,

* *See p.* 75-6-7 of this volume.

Miller, which was immediately accepted. It was not convenient for Mrs. Burns to remove immediately from Ayrshire, and our poet therefore took up his residence alone at Ellisland, to prepare for the reception of his wife and children, who joined him towards the end of the year.

The situation in which Burns now found himself was calculated to awaken reflection. The different steps he had of late taken were in their nature highly important, and might be said to have, in some measure, fixed his destiny. He had become a husband and a father; he had engaged in the management of a considerable farm, a difficult and laborious undertaking; in his success the happiness of his family was involved; it was time, therefore, to abandon the gaiety and dissipation of which he had been too much enamoured; to ponder seriously on the past, and to form virtuous resolutions respecting the future. That such was actually the state of his mind, the following extract from his common-place book may bear witness:

Ellisland, Sunday, 14*th June,* 1788.

"This is now the third day that I have been in this country. 'Lord, what is man!' What a bustling little bundle of passions, appetites, ideas,

ideas and fancies! And what a capricious kind of existence he has here! * * * There is indeed an elsewhere, where, as Thomson says, *virtue sole survives.*

> " Tell us, ye dead;
> Will none of you in pity disclose the secret,
> What 'tis you are, and we must shortly be?
> ——————————A little time
> Will make us wise as you are, and as close."

" I am such a coward in life, so tired of the service, that I would almost at any time, with Milton's Adam, 'gladly lay me in my mother's lap, and be at peace.'

" But a wife and children bind me to struggle with the stream, till some sudden squall shall overset the silly vessel, or in the listless return of years, its own craziness reduce it to a wreck. Farewell now to those giddy follies, those varnished vices, which, though half-sanctified by the bewitching levity of wit and humour, are at best but thriftless idling with the precious current of existence; nay, often poisoning the whole, that, like the plains of Jericho, *the water is naught and the ground barren,* and nothing short of a supernaturally-gifted Elisha can ever after heal the evils.

"Wedlock, the circumstance that buckles me hardest to care, if virtue and religion were to be any thing with me but names, was what in a few seasons I must have resolved on; in my present situation it was absolutely necessary. Humanity, generosity, honest pride of character, justice to my own happiness for after life, so far as it could depend (which it surely will a great deal) on internal peace; all these joined their warmest suffrages, their most powerful solicitations, with a rooted attachment, to urge the step I have taken. Nor have I any reason on *her* part to repent it.—I can fancy how, but have never seen where, I could have made a better choice. Come, then, let me act up to my favourite motto, that glorious passage in Young—

"On reason build resolve,
That column of true majesty in man!"

Under the impulse of these reflections, Burns immediately engaged in rebuilding the dwelling-house on his farm, which, in the state he found it, was inadequate to the accommodation of his family. On this occasion, he himself resumed at times the occupation of a labourer, and found neither his strength nor his skill impaired. —Pleased with surveying the grounds he was about to cultivate, and with the rearing of a building that should give shelter to his wife and children,

children, and, as he fondly hoped, to his own grey hairs, sentiments of independence buoyed up his mind, pictures of domestic content and peace rose on his imagination; and a few days passed away, as he himself informs us, the most tranquil, if not the happiest, which he had ever experienced.*

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* Animated sentiments of any kind, almost always gave rise in our poet to some production of his muse. His sentiments on this occasion were in part expressed by the following vigorous and characteristic, though not very delicate verses: they are in imitation of an old ballad.

I hae a wife o' my ain,
I'll partake wi' nae-body;
I'll tak cuckold frae nane,
I'll gie cuckold to nae-body.

I hae a penny to spend,
There—thanks to nae-body;
I hae naething to lend,
I'll borrow frae nae-body.

I am nae-body's lord,
I'll be slave to nae-body;
I hae a guid braid sword,
I'll tak dunts frae nae-body.

I'll be merry and free,
I'll be sad for nae-body;
If nae-body care for me,
I'll care for nae-body.

It is to be lamented that at this critical period of his life, our poet was without the society of his wife and children. A great change had taken place in his situation; his old habits were broken; and the new circumstances in which he was placed were calculated to give a new direction to his thoughts and conduct.* But his application to the cares and labours of his farm was interrupted by several visits to his family in Ayrshire; and as the distance was too great for a single day's journey, he generally spent a night at an inn on the road. On such occasions he sometimes fell into company, and forgot the resolutions he had formed. In a little while temptation assailed him nearer home.

His fame naturally drew upon him the attention of his neighbours, and he soon formed a general acquaintance in the district in which he lived. The public voice had now pronounced on the subject of his talents; the reception he had met with in Edinburgh had given him the currency which fashion bestows; he had surmounted the prejudices arising from his humble birth, and he was received at the table of the gentlemen of Nithsdale with welcome,

* Mrs. Burns was about to be confined in child-bed, and the house at Ellisland was rebuilding.

come, with kindness, and even with respect. Their social parties too often seduced him from his rustic labours and his rustic fare, overthrew the unsteady fabric of his resolutions, and inflamed those propensities which temperance might have weakened, and prudence ultimately suppressed.* It was not long, therefore, before Burns began to view his farm with dislike and despondence, if not with disgust.

Unfortunately he had for several years looked to an office in the Excise as a certain means of livelihood, should his other expectations fail. As has already been mentioned, he had been recommended to the Board of Excise, and had received

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* The poem of *The Whistle* (*vol.* iii. *p.* 368) celebrates a Bacchanalian contest among three gentlemen of Nithsdale, where Burns appears as umpire. Mr. Riddell died before our Bard, and some elegiac verses to his memory will be found in *vol.* iv. *p.* 368. From him, and from all the members of his family, Burns received not kindness only, but friendship; and the society he met in general at Friar's Carse was calculated to improve his habits as well as his manners. Mr. Ferguson of Craigdarroch, so well known for his eloquence and social talents, died soon after our poet. Sir Robert Laurie, the third person in the drama, survives, and has since been engaged in contests of a bloodier nature. Long may he live to fight the battles of his country! (1799).

received the instruction necessary for such a situation. He now applied to be employed; and by the interest of Mr. Graham of Fintry, was appointed exciseman, or, as it is vulgarly called, gauger, of the district in which he lived. His farm was after this, in a great measure, abandoned to servants, while he betook himself to the duties of his new appointment.

He might, indeed, still be seen in the spring, directing his plough, a labour in which he excelled; or with a white sheet, containing his seed-corn, slung across his shoulders, striding with measured steps along his turned-up furrows, and scattering the grain in the earth. But his farm no longer occupied the principal part of his care or his thoughts. It was not at Ellisland that he was now in general to be found. Mounted on horseback, this high-minded poet was pursuing the defaulters of the revenue, among the hills and vales of Nithsdale, his roving eye wandering over the charms of nature, and *muttering his wayward fancies* as he moved along.

"I had an adventure with him in the year 1790," says Mr. Ramsay, of Ochtertyre, in a letter to the editor, "when passing through Dumfries-shire, on a tour to the South, with Dr. Steuart of Luss. Seeing him pass quickly, near Closeburn,

Closeburn, I said to my companion, 'that is Burns.' On coming to the inn, the hostler told us he would be back in a few hours to grant permits; that where he met with any thing seizable he was no better than any other gauger; in every thing else, that he was perfectly a gentleman. After leaving a note to be delivered to him on his return, I proceeded to his house, being curious to see his Jean, &c. I was much pleased with his *uxor Sabina qualis*, and the poet's modest mansion, so unlike the habitation of ordinary rustics. In the evening he suddenly bounced in upon us, and said, as he entered, I come, to use the words of Shakespeare, *stewed in haste*. In fact he had ridden incredibly fast after receiving my note. We fell into conversation directly, and soon got into the *mare magnum* of poetry. He told me that he had now gotten a story for a Drama, which he was to call *Rob Macquechan's Elshon*, from a popular story of Robert Bruce being defeated on the water of Caern, when the heel of his boot having loosened in his flight, he applied to Robert Macquechan to fit it; who, to make sure, ran his awl nine inches up the King's heel. We were now going on at a great rate, when Mr. S—— popped in his head; which put a stop to our discourse, which had become very interesting. Yet in a little while it was resumed; and such was the force and versatility

of

of the bard's genius, that he made the tears run down Mr. S——'s cheeks, albeit unused to the poetic strain. * * * From that time we met no more, and I was grieved at the reports of him afterwards. Poor Burns! we shall hardly ever see his like again. He was, in truth, a sort of comet in literature, irregular in its motions, which did not do good proportioned to the blaze of light it displayed."

In the summer of 1791, two English gentlemen, who had before met with him in Edinburgh, paid a visit to him at Ellisland. On calling at the house, they were informed that he had walked out on the banks of the river; and dismounting from their horses, they proceeded in search of him. On a rock that projected into the stream, they saw a man employed in angling, of a singular appearance. He had a cap made of a fox's skin on his head, a loose great coat fixed round him by a belt, from which depended an enormous Highland broadsword. It was Burns. He received them with great cordiality, and asked them to share his humble dinner—an invitation which they accepted. On the table they found boiled beef, with vegetables, and barley broth, after the manner of Scotland, of which they partook heartily. After dinner, the bard told them ingenuously that he had no wine to offer them, nothing

nothing better than Highland whiskey, a bottle of which Mrs. Burns set on the board. He produced at the same time his punch-bowl made of Inverary marble, and, mixing the spirit with water and sugar, filled their glasses, and invited them to drink.* The travellers were in haste, and besides, the flavour of the whiskey to their *suthron* palates was scarcely tolerable; but the generous poet offered them his best, and his ardent hospitality they found it impossible to resist. Burns was in his happiest mood, and the charms of his conversation were altogether fascinating. He ranged over a great variety of topics, illuminating whatever he touched. He related the tales of his infancy and of his youth; he recited some of the gayest and some of the tenderest of his poems; in the wildest of his strains of mirth, he threw in some touches of melancholy, and spread around him the electric emotions of his powerful mind. The Highland whiskey improved in its flavour; the marble bowl was again and again emptied and replenished; the guests of our poet forgot the flight of time, and the dictates of prudence: at the hour of midnight they lost their way in returning

* This bowl was made of the stone of which Inverary-house is built, the mansion of the family of Argyle. This stone is the *lapis ollaris*.

ing to Dumfries, and could scarcely distinguish it when assisted by the morning's dawn.*

Besides his duties in the excise and his social pleasures, other circumstances interfered with the attention of Burns to his farm. He engaged in the formation of a society for purchasing and circulating books among the farmers of his neighbourhood, of which he undertook the management;† and he occupied himself occasionally in composing songs for the musical work of Mr. Johnson, then in the course of publication. These engagements, useful and honourable in themselves, contributed, no doubt, to the abstraction of his thoughts from the business of agriculture.

The consequences may be easily imagined. Notwithstanding the uniform prudence and good management of Mrs. Burns, and though his rent was moderate and reasonable, our poet found it convenient, if not necessary, to resign his farm to Mr. Miller; after having occupied it three years and a half. His office in the excise had originally produced about fifty pounds per annum. Having acquitted himself to the satisfaction

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* Given from the information of one of the party.

† *See vol.* ii. *p.* 274.

satisfaction of the board, he had been appointed to a new district, the emoluments of which rose to about seventy pounds per annum. Hoping to support himself and his family on this humble income till promotion should reach him, he disposed of his stock and of his crop on Ellisland by public auction, and removed to a small house which he had taken in Dumfries, about the end of the year 1791.

Hitherto Burns, though addicted to excess in social parties, had abstained from the habitual use of strong liquors, and his constitution had not suffered any permanent injury from the irregularities of his conduct. In Dumfries, temptations to *the sin that so easily beset him*, continually presented themselves; and his irregularities grew by degrees into habits. These temptations unhappily occurred during his engagements in the business of his office, as well as during his hours of relaxation; and though he clearly foresaw the consequence of yielding to them, his appetites and sensations, which could not prevent the dictates of his judgment, finally triumphed over the powers of his will. Yet this victory was not obtained without many obstinate struggles, and at times temperance and virtue seemed to have obtained the mastery. Besides his engagements in the excise, and the society into which they led, many circumstances contributed

contributed to the melancholy fate of Burns. His great celebrity made him an object of interest and curiosity to strangers, and few persons of cultivated minds passed through Dumfries without attempting to see our poet, and to enjoy the pleasure of his conversation. As he could not receive them under his own humble roof, these interviews passed at the inns of the town, and often terminated in those excesses which Burns sometimes provoked, and was seldom able to resist. And among the inhabitants of Dumfries and its vicinity, there were never wanting persons to share his social pleasures; to lead or accompany him to the tavern; to partake in the wildest sallies of his wit; to witness the strength and the degradation of his genius.

Still, however, he cultivated the society of persons of taste and of respectability, and in their company could impose on himself the restraints of temperance and decorum. Nor was his muse dormant. In the four years which he lived in Dumfries, he produced many of his beautiful lyrics, though it does not appear that he attempted any poem of considerable length. During this time he made several excursions into the neighbouring country, of one of which, through Galloway, an account is preserved in a letter of Mr. Syme, written soon after; which, as it gives an animated picture of him by a correct

rect and masterly hand, we shall present to the reader.

" I got Burns a grey Highland shelty to ride on. We dined the first day, 27th July, 1793, at Glendenwynes of Parton; a beautiful situation on the banks of the Dee. In the evening we walked out, and ascended a gentle eminence, from which we had as fine a view of Alpine scenery as can well be imagined. A delightful soft evening showed all its wilder as well as its grander graces. Immediately opposite, and within a mile of us, we saw Airds, a charming romantic place, where dwelt Low, the author of *Mary weep no more for me.** This was classical ground for Burns. He viewed " the highest hill which rises o'er the source of Dee;" and would have staid till " the passing spirit" had appeared, had we not resolved to reach Kenmore that night. We arrived as Mr. and Mrs. Gordon were sitting down to supper.

" Here is a genuine baron's seat. The castle,

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* A beautiful and well-known ballad, which begins thus:

The moon had climb'd the highest hill
Which rises o'er the source of Dee;
And, from the eastern summit, shed
Its silver light on tower and tree.

castle, an old building, stands on a large natural moat. In front, the river Ken winds for several miles through the most fertile and beautiful *holm*,* till it expands into a lake twelve miles long, the banks of which, on the south, present a fine and soft landscape of green knolls, natural wood, and here and there a grey rock. On the north, the aspect is great, wild, and, I may say, tremendous. In short, I can scarcely conceive a scene more terribly romantic than the castle of Kenmore. Burns thinks so highly of it, that he meditates a description of it in poetry. Indeed, I believe he has begun the work. We spent three days with Mr. Gordon, whose polished hospitality is of an original and endearing kind. Mrs. Gordon's lap-dog, *Echo*, was dead. She would have an epitaph for him. Several had been made. Burns was asked for one. This was setting Hercules to his distaff. He disliked the subject; but, to please the lady, he would try. Here is what he produced:

In wood and wild ye warbling throng
Your heavy loss deplore;
Now half extinct your powers of song,
Sweet Echo is no more.

Ye

* The level low-ground on the banks of a river or stream. This word should be adopted from the Scottish, as, indeed, ought several others of the same nature. That dialect is singularly copious and exact in the denominations of natural objects. E.

Ye jarring screeching things around,
Scream your discordant joys;
Now half your din of tuneless sound
With Echo silent lies.

"We left Kenmore, and went to Gatehouse. I took him the moor-road, where savage and desolate regions extended wide around. The sky was sympathetic with the wretchedness of the soil; it became lowering and dark. The hollow winds sighed, the lightnings gleamed, the thunder rolled. The poet enjoyed the awful scene—he spoke not a word, but seemed rapt in meditation. In a little while the rain began to fall; it poured in floods upon us. For three hours did the wild elements *rumble their bellyfull* upon our defenceless heads. *Oh, oh! 'twas foul.* We got utterly wet; and to revenge ourselves, Burns insisted at Gatehouse on our getting utterly drunk.

"From Gatehouse, we went next day to Kirkcudbright, through a fine country. But here I must tell you that Burns had got a pair of *jemmy* boots for the journey, which had been thoroughly wet, and which had been dried in such a manner that it was not possible to get them on again. The brawny poet tried force, and tore them to shreds. A whiffling vexation of this sort is more trying to the temper than a serious

serious calamity. We were going to Saint Mary's Isle, the seat of the Earl of Selkirk, and the forlorn Burns was discomfited at the thought of his ruined boots. A sick stomach, and a head-ache, lent their aid, and the man of verse was quite *accablé*. I attempted to reason with him. Mercy on us, how he did fume and rage! Nothing could re-instate him in temper. I tried various expedients, and at last hit on one that succeeded. I showed him the house of * * * *, across the bay of Wigton. Against * * * *, with whom he was offended, he expectorated his spleen, and regained a most agreeable temper. He was in a most epigrammatic humour indeed! He afterwards fell on humbler game. There is one * * * * * * whom he does not love. He had a passing blow at him.

When ******, deceased, to the devil went down,
'Twas nothing would serve him but Satan's own crown:
Thy fool's head, quoth Satan, that crown shall wear never,
I grant thou'rt as wicked, but not quite so clever.

" Well, I am to bring you to Kirkcudbright along with our poet, without boots. I carried the torn ruins across my saddle in spite of his fulminations, and in contempt of appearances; and what is more, Lord Selkirk carried them in his

his coach to Dumfries. He insisted they were worth mending.

" We reached Kirkcudbright about one o'clock. I had promised that we should dine with one of the first men in our country, J. Dalzell. But Burns was in a wild and obstreperous humour, and swore he would not dine where he should be under the smallest restraint. We prevailed, therefore, on Mr. Dalzell to dine with us in the inn, and had a very agreeable party. In the evening we set out for St. Mary's Isle. Robert had not absolutely regained the milkiness of good temper, and it occurred once or twice to him, as he rode along, that St. Mary's Isle was the seat of a Lord; yet that Lord was not an aristocrat, at least in his sense of the word. We arrived about eight o'clock, as the family were at tea and coffee. St. Mary's Isle is one of the most delightful places that can, in my opinion, be formed by the assemblage of every soft, but not tame object which constitutes natural and cultivated beauty. But not to dwell on its external graces, let me tell you that we found all the ladies of the family (all beautiful) at home, and some strangers; and among others, who but Urbani! The Italian sung us many Scottish songs, accompanied with instrumental music. The two young ladies of Selkirk sung also. We had the song of Lord

Gregory, which I asked for, to have an opportunity of calling on Burns to recite *his* ballad to that tune. He did recite it; and such was the effect, that a dead silence ensued. It was such a silence as a mind of feeling naturally preserves when it is touched with that enthusiasm which banishes every other thought but the contemplation and indulgence of the sympathy produced. Burns's Lord Gregory is, in my opinion, a most beautiful and affecting ballad.* The fastidious critic may perhaps say, some of the sentiments and imagery are of too elevated a kind for such a style of composition; for instance, "Thou bolt of Heaven that passest by;" and, "Ye mustering thunder," &c.; but this is a cold-blooded objection, which will be *said* rather than *felt*.

"We enjoyed a most happy evening at Lord Selkirk's. We had, in every sense of the word, a feast, in which our minds and our senses were equally gratified. The poet was delighted with his company, and acquitted himself to admiration. The lion that had raged so violently in the morning, was now as mild and gentle as a lamb. Next day we returned to Dumfries, and so ends our peregrination. I told you, that in the midst of the storm, on the wilds of Kenmore,

* *See vol.* iv. *p.* 38.

more, Burns was rapt in meditation. What do you think he was about? He was charging the English army, along with Bruce, at Bannockburn. He was engaged in the same manner on our ride home from St. Mary's Isle, and I did not disturb him. Next day he produced me the following address of Bruce to his troops, and gave me a copy for Dalzell."

"Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled," &c.*

Burns had entertained hopes of promotion in the excise; but circumstances occurred which retarded their fulfilment, and which, in his own mind, destroyed all expectation of their being ever fulfilled. The extraordinary events which ushered in the revolution of France, interested the feelings, and excited the hopes of men in every corner of Europe. Prejudice and tyranny seemed about to disappear from among men, and the day-star of reason to rise upon a benighted world. In the dawn of this beautiful morning, the genius of French freedom appeared on our southern horizon with the countenance of an angel, but speedily assumed the features of a demon, and vanished in a shower of blood.

Though previously a jacobite and a cavalier,

* *See vol.* iv. *p.* 125.

Burns had shared in the original hopes entertained of this astonishing revolution, by ardent and benevolent minds. The novelty and the hazard of the attempt meditated by the First, or Constituent Assembly, served rather, it is probable, to recommend it to his daring temper; and the unfettered scope proposed to be given to every kind of talents, was doubtless gratifying to the feelings of conscious but indignant genius. Burns foresaw not the mighty ruin that was to be the immediate consequence of an enterprise, which on its commencement, promised so much happiness to the human race. And even after the career of guilt and of blood commenced, he could not immediately, it may be presumed, withdraw his partial gaze from a people who had so lately breathed the sentiments of universal peace and benignity, or obliterate in his bosom the pictures of hope and of happiness to which those sentiments had given birth. Under these impressions, he did not always conduct himself with the circumspection and prudence which his dependent situation seemed to demand. He engaged indeed in no popular associations, so common at the time of which we speak; but in company he did not conceal his opinions of public measures, or of the reforms required in the practice of our government: and sometimes, in his social and unguarded

guarded moments, he uttered them with a wild and unjustifiable vehemence. Information of this was given to the Board of Excise, with the exaggerations so general in such cases. A superior officer in that department was authorized to inquire into his conduct. Burns defended himself in a letter addressed to one of the Board, written with great independence of spirit, and with more than his accustomed eloquence. The officer appointed to inquire into his conduct gave a favourable report. His steady friend, Mr. Graham of Fintry, interposed his good offices in his behalf; and the imprudent gauger was suffered to retain his situation, but given to understand that his promotion was deferred, and must depend on his future behaviour.

This circumstance made a deep impression on the mind of Burns. Fame exaggerated his misconduct, and represented him as actually dismissed from his office; and this report induced a gentleman of much respectability to propose a subscription in his favour. The offer was refused by our poet in a letter of great elevation of sentiment, in which he gives an account of the whole of this transaction, and defends himself from the imputation of disloyal sentiments on the one hand, and on the other, from the charge of having made submissions for the sake of his office, unworthy of his character.

" The

" The partiality of my countrymen," he observes, " has brought me forward as a man of genius, and has given me a character to support. In the poet I have avowed manly and independent sentiments, which I hope have been found in the man. Reasons of no less weight than the support of a wife and children, have pointed out my present occupation as the only eligible line of life within my reach. Still my honest fame is my dearest concern, and a thousand times have I trembled at the idea of the degrading epithets that malice or misrepresentation may affix to my name. Often in blasting anticipation have I listened to some future hackney scribbler, with the heavy malice of savage stupidity, exultingly asserting that Burns, notwithstanding the *fanfaronade* of independence to be found in his works, and after having been held up to public view, and to public estimation, as a man of some genius, yet, quite destitute of resources within himself to support his borrowed dignity, dwindled into a paltry exciseman, and slunk out the rest of his insignificant existence in the meanest of pursuits, and among the lowest of mankind.

" In your illustrious hands, Sir, permit me to lodge my strong disavowal and defiance of such slanderous falsehoods. Burns was a poor man from his birth, and an exciseman by necessity :

cessity: but—I *will* say it! the sterling of his honest worth, poverty could not debase, and his independent British spirit, oppression might bend, but could not subdue."

It was one of the last acts of his life to copy this letter into his book of manuscripts, accompanied by some additional remarks on the same subject. It is not surprising, that at a season of universal alarm for the safety of the constitution, the indiscreet expressions of a man so powerful as Burns, should have attracted notice. The times certainly required extraordinary vigilance in those intrusted with the administration of the government, and to ensure the safety of the constitution was doubtless their first duty. Yet generous minds will lament that their measures of precaution should have robbed the imagination of our poet of the last prop on which his hopes of independence rested, and by embittering his peace, have aggravated those excesses which were soon to conduct him to an untimely grave.

Though the vehemence of Burns's temper, increased as it often was by stimulating liquors, might lead him into many improper and unguarded expressions, there seems no reason to doubt of his attachment to our mixed form of government.

government. In his common-place book, where he could have no temptation to disguise, are the following sentiments.—"Whatever might be my sentiments of republics, ancient or modern, as to Britain, I ever abjured the idea. A constitution, which in its original principles, experience has proved to be every way fitted for our happiness, it would be insanity to abandon for an untried visionary theory." In conformity to these sentiments, when the pressing nature of public affairs called in 1795 for a general arming of the people, Burns appeared in the ranks of the Dumfries volunteers, and employed his poetical talents in stimulating their patriotism;* and at this season of alarm, he brought forward the following hymn, worthy of the Grecian Muse, when Greece was most conspicuous for genius and valour.

Scene—A Field of Battle—Time of the Day, Evening—the wounded and dying of the victorious Army are supposed to join in the following Song:

Farewell, thou fair day, thou green earth, and ye skies,
Now gay with the bright setting sun;
Farewell loves and friendships, ye dear tender ties,
Our race of existence is run!

Thou

* *See vol.* iv. *p.* 384.

Thou grim king of terrors, thou life's gloomy foe,
Go, frighten the coward and slave;
Go, teach them to tremble, fell tyrant! but know,
No terrors hast thou to the brave!

Thou strik'st the dull peasant, he sinks in the dark,
Nor saves e'en the wreck of a name;
Thou strik'st the young hero—a glorious mark!
He falls in the blaze of his fame!

In the field of proud honor—our swords in our hands,
Our king and our country to save—
While victory shines on life's last ebbing sands,
O! who would not rest with the brave!*

Though by nature of an athletic form, Burns had in his constitution the peculiarities and the delicacies that belong to the temperament of genius. He was liable, from a very early period of

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* This poem was written in 1791. *See vol.* ii. *p.* 335. It was printed in *Johnson's Musical Museum.* The poet had an intention, in the latter part of his life, of printing it separately, set to music, but was advised against it, or at least discouraged from it. The martial ardour which rose so high afterwards, on the threatened invasion, had not then acquired the tone necessary to give popularity to this noble poem; which to the editor, seems more calculated to invigorate the spirit of defence, in a season of real and pressing danger, than any production of modern times. It is here printed with his last corrections, varied a little from the copy followed, *vol.* ii. *p.* 385.

of life, to that interruption in the process of digestion, which arises from deep and anxious thought, and which is sometimes the effect, and sometimes the cause of depression of spirits. Connected with this disorder of the stomach, there was a disposition to head-ache, affecting more especially the temples and eye-balls, and frequently accompanied by violent and irregular movements of the heart. Endowed by nature with great sensibility of nerves, Burns was, in his corporeal, as well as in his mental system, liable to inordinate impressions; to fever of body as well as of mind. This predisposition to disease, which strict temperance in diet, regular exercise, and sound sleep, might have subdued, habits of a very different nature strengthened and inflamed. Perpetually stimulated by alcohol in one or other of its various forms, the inordinate actions of the circulating system became at length habitual; the process of nutrition was unable to supply the waste, and the powers of life began to fail. Upwards of a year before his death, there was an evident decline in our poet's personal appearance, and though his appetite continued unimpaired, he was himself sensible that his constitution was sinking. In his moments of thought he reflected with the deepest regret on his fatal progress, clearly foreseeing the goal towards which he was hastening, without the strength of mind necessary to stop, or even to slacken his course.

course. His temper now became more irritable and gloomy; he fled from himself into society, often of the lowest kind. And in such company, that part of the convivial scene, in which wine increases sensibility and excites benevolence, was hurried over, to reach the succeeding part, over which uncontroled passion generally presided. He who suffers the pollution of inebriation, how shall he escape other pollution? But let us refrain from the mention of errors over which delicacy and humanity draw the veil.

In the midst of all his wanderings, Burns met nothing in his domestic circle but gentleness and forgiveness, except in the gnawings of his own remorse. He acknowledged his transgressions to the wife of his bosom, promised amendment, and again and again received pardon for his offences. But as the strength of his body decayed, his resolution became feebler, and habit acquired predominating strength.

From October 1795, to the January following, an accidental complaint confined him to the house. A few days after he began to go abroad, he dined at a tavern, and returned home about three o'clock in a very cold morning, benumbed and intoxicated. This was followed by an attack of rheumatism, which confined him about a week. His appetite now began to fail; his hand shook, and

and his voice faltered on any exertion or emotion. His pulse became weaker and more rapid, and pain in the larger joints, and in the hands and feet, deprived him of the enjoyment of refreshing sleep. Too much dejected in his spirits, and too well aware of his real situation to entertain hopes of recovery, he was ever musing on the approaching desolation of his family, and his spirits sunk into an uniform gloom.

It was hoped by some of his friends, that if he could live through the months of spring, the succeeding season might restore him. But they were disappointed. The genial beams of the sun infused no vigour into his languid frame; the summer wind blew upon him, but produced no refreshment. About the latter end of June he was advised to go into the country, and impatient of medical advice, as well as of every species of control, he determined for himself to try the effects of bathing in the sea. For this purpose he took up his residence at Brow, in Annandale, about ten miles east of Dumfries, on the shore of the Solway-Firth.

It happened that at that time a lady with whom he had been connected in friendship by the sympathies of kindred genius, was residing in the immediate neighbourhood.* Being informed

* For a character of this lady, *see vol.* ii. *p.* 389.

formed of his arrival, she invited him to dinner, and sent her carriage for him to the cottage where he lodged, as he was unable to walk.—" I was struck," says this lady (in a confidential letter to a friend written soon after), " with his appearance on entering the room. The stamp of death was imprinted on his features. He seemed already touching the brink of eternity. His first salutation was, " Well, Madam, have you any commands for the other world?" I replied, that it seemed a doubtful case which of us should be there soonest, and that I hoped he would yet live to write my epitaph. (I was then in a bad state of health). He looked in my face with an air of great kindness, and expressed his concern at seeing me look so ill, with his accustomed sensibility. At table he ate little or nothing, and he complained of having entirely lost the tone of his stomach. We had a long and serious conversation about his present situation, and the approaching termination of all his earthly prospects. He spoke of his death without any of the ostentation of philosophy, but with firmness as well as feeling—as an event likely to happen very soon, and which gave him concern chiefly from leaving his four children so young and unprotected, and his wife in so interesting a situation—in hourly expectation of lying-in of a fifth. He mentioned, with seeming pride and satisfaction, the promising genius of his eldest son, and the

the flattering marks of approbation he had received from his teachers, and dwelt particularly on his hopes of that boy's future conduct and merit. His anxiety for his family seemed to hang heavy upon him, and the more perhaps from the reflection that he had not done them all the justice he was so well qualified to do. Passing from this subject, he shewed great concern about the care of his literary fame, and particularly the publication of his posthumous works. He said he was well aware that his death would occasion some noise, and that every scrap of his writing would be revived against him to the injury of his future reputation: that letters and verses written with unguarded and improper freedom, and which he earnestly wished to have buried in oblivion, would be handed about by idle vanity or malevolence, when no dread of his resentment would restrain them, or prevent the censures of shrill-tongued malice, or the insidious sarcasms of envy, from pouring forth all their venom to blast his fame.

" He lamented that he had written many epigrams on persons against whom he entertained no enmity, and whose characters he should be sorry to wound; and many indifferent poetical pieces, which he feared would now, with all their imperfections on their head, be

be thrust upon the world. On this account he deeply regretted having deferred to put his papers in a state of arrangement, as he was now quite incapable of the exertion."—The lady goes on to mention many other topics of a private nature on which he spoke.—" The conversation," she adds, " was kept up with great evenness and animation on his side. I had seldom seen his mind greater or more collected. There was frequently a considerable degree of vivacity in his sallies, and they would probably have had a greater share, had not the concern and dejection I could not disguise, damped the spirit of pleasantry he seemed not unwilling to indulge.

" We parted about sun-set on the evening of that day (the 5th of July, 1796); the next day I saw him again, and we parted to meet no more!"

At first Burns imagined bathing in the sea had been of benefit to him: the pains in his limbs were relieved; but this was immediately followed by a new attack of fever. When brought back to his own house in Dumfries, on the 18th of July, he was no longer able to stand upright. At this time a tremor pervaded his frame: his tongue was parched, and his mind

mind sunk into delirium, when not roused by conversation. On the second and third day the fever increased, and his strength diminished. On the fourth, the sufferings of this great, but ill-fated genius were terminated, and a life was closed in which virtue and passion had been at perpetual variance.*

The death of Burns made a strong and general impression on all who had interested themselves in his character, and especially on the inhabitants of the town and county in which he had spent the latter years of his life. Flagrant as his follies and errors had been, they had not deprived him of the respect and regard entertained for the extraordinary powers of his genius, and the generous qualities of his heart. The Gentlemen-Volunteers of Dumfries determined to bury their illustrious associate with military honours, and every preparation was made to render this last service solemn and impressive. The Fencible Infantry of Angus-shire, and the regiment of cavalry of the Cinque Ports, at that time quartered in Dumfries, offered their assistance on this occasion; the principal inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood determined

* The particulars respecting the illness and death of Burns were obligingly furnished by Dr. Maxwell, the physician who attended him.

mined to walk in the funeral procession; and a vast concourse of persons assembled, some of them from a considerable distance, to witness the obsequies of the Scottish Bard. On the evening of the 25th of July, the remains of Burns were removed from his house to the Town-Hall, and the funeral took place on the succeeding day. A party of the volunteers, selected to perform the military duty in the church-yard, stationed themselves in the front of the procession, with their arms reversed; the main body of the corps surrounded and supported the coffin, on which were placed the hat and sword of their friend and fellow-soldier; the numerous body of attendants ranged themselves in the rear; while the Fencible regiments of infantry and cavalry lined the streets from the Town-Hall to the burial-ground in the Southern church-yard, a distance of more than half a mile. The whole procession moved forward to that sublime and affecting strain of music, the *Dead March* in Saul: and three volleys fired over his grave marked the return of Burns to his parent earth! The spectacle was in a high degree grand and solemn, and accorded with the general sentiments of sympathy and sorrow which the occasion had called forth.

It was an affecting circumstance, that, on the morning of the day of her husband's fune-

ral, Mrs. Burns was undergoing the pains of labour, and that during the solemn service we have just been describing, the posthumous son of our poet was born. This infant boy, who received the name of Maxwell, was not destined to a long life. He has already become an inhabitant of the same grave with his celebrated father. The four other children of our poet, all sons (the eldest at that time about ten years of age) yet survive, and give every promise of prudence and virtue that can be expected from their tender years. They remain under the care of their affectionate mother in Dumfries, and are enjoying the means of education which the excellent schools of that town afford; the teachers of which, in their conduct to the children of Burns, do themselves great honour. On this occasion, the name of Mr. Whyte deserves to be particularly mentioned, himself a poet, as well as a man of science.*

Burns died in great poverty; but the independence of his spirit, and the exemplary prudence of his wife, had preserved him from debt. He had received from his poems a clear profit of about nine hundred pounds. Of this sum, the part expended on his library (which was far from

* Author of *St. Guerdon's Well*, a poem; and of *A Tribute to the Memory of Burns.*

from extensive) and in the humble furniture of his house, remained; and obligations were found for two hundred pounds advanced by him to the assistance of those to whom he was united by the ties of blood, and still more by those of esteem and affection. When it is considered, that his expenses in Edinburgh, and on his various journeys, could not be inconsiderable; that his agricultural undertaking was unsuccessful; that his income from the excise was for some time as low as fifty, and never rose to above seventy pounds a year; that his family was large, and his spirit liberal—no one will be surprised that his circumstances were so poor, or that, as his health decayed, his proud and feeling heart sunk under the secret consciousness of indigence, and the apprehensions of absolute want. Yet poverty never bent the spirit of Burns to any pecuniary meanness. Neither chicanery nor sordidness ever appeared in his conduct. He carried his disregard of money to a blameable excess. Even in the midst of distress he bore himself loftily to the world, and received with a jealous reluctance every offer of friendly assistance. His printed poems had procured him great celebrity, and a just and fair recompense for the latter offsprings of his pen might have produced him considerable emolument. In the year 1795, the Editor of a London newspaper, high in its character for

literature, and independence of sentiment, made a proposal to him that he should furnish them, once a week, with an article for their poetical department, and receive from them a recompense of fifty-two guineas per annum; an offer which the pride of genius disdained to accept. Yet he had for several years furnished, and was at that time furnishing, the *Museum* of Johnson with his beautiful lyrics, without fee or reward, and was obstinately refusing all recompense for his assistance to the greater work of Mr. Thomson, which the justice and generosity of that gentleman was pressing upon him.

The sense of his poverty, and of the approaching distress of his infant family, pressed heavily on Burns as he lay on the bed of death. Yet he alluded to his indigence, at times, with something approaching to his wonted gaiety.—"What business," said he to Dr. Maxwell, who attended him with the utmost zeal, "has a physician to waste his time on me? I am a poor pigeon, not worth plucking. Alas! I have not feathers enough upon me to carry me to my grave." And when his reason was lost in delirium, his ideas ran in the same melancholy train; the horrors of a jail were continually present to his troubled imagination, and produced the most affecting exclamations.

As

As for some months previous to his death he had been incapable of the duties of his office, Burns dreaded that his salary should be reduced one half, as is usual in such cases. His full emoluments were, however, continued to him by the kindness of Mr. Stobbie, a young expectant in the Excise, who performed the duties of his office without fee or reward;* and Mr. Graham of Fintry, hearing of his illness, though unacquainted with its dangerous nature, made an offer of his assistance towards procuring him the means of preserving his health.—Whatever might be the faults of Burns, ingratitude was not of the number.—Amongst his manuscripts, various proofs are found of the sense he entertained of Mr. Graham's friendship, which delicacy towards that gentleman has induced us to suppress; and on this last occasion there is no doubt that his heart overflowed towards him, though he had no longer the power of expressing his feelings.†

On

* In the first Edition, it is supposed that the Board of Excise deviated from their usual rule (a shocking rule it is!) in our Poet's favour. It appears, on better information, that the members of that Board were not guilty of any such weakness.

† The letter of Mr. Graham, alluded to above, is dated on the 13th of July, and probably arrived on the 15th. Burns became delirious on the 17th or 18th, and died on the 21st.

On the death of Burns, the inhabitants of Dumfries and its neighbourhood opened a subscription for the support of his wife and family; and Mr. Miller, Mr. M'Murdo, Dr. Maxwell, Mr. Syme, and Mr. Cunningham, gentlemen of the first respectability, became trustees for the application of the money to its proper objects. The subscription was extended to other parts of Scotland, and of England also, particularly London and Liverpool. By this means a sum was raised amounting to seven hundred pounds; and thus the widow and children were rescued from immediate distress, and the most melancholy of the forebodings of Burns happily disappointed. It is true, this sum, though equal to their present support, is insufficient to secure them from future penury. Their hope in regard to futurity depends on the favourable reception of these volumes from the public at large, in the promoting of which the candour and humanity of the Reader may induce him to lend his assistance.

Burns, as has already been mentioned, was nearly five feet ten inches in height, and of a form that indicated agility as well as strength. His well-raised forehead, shaded with black curling hair, indicated extensive capacity. His eyes were large, dark, full of ardour and intelligence. His face was well formed; and his countenance

countenance uncommonly interesting and expressive. His mode of dressing, which was often slovenly, and a certain fulness and bend in his shoulders, characteristic of his original profession, disguised in some degree the natural symmetry and elegance of his form. The external appearance of Burns was most strikingly indicative of the character of his mind. On a first view, his physiognomy had a certain air of coarseness, mingled, however, with an expression of deep penetration, and of calm thoughtfulness approaching to melancholy. There appeared in his first manner and address, perfect ease and self-possession, but a stern and almost supercilious elevation, not, indeed, incompatible with openness and affability, which, however, bespoke a mind conscious of superior talents. Strangers that supposed themselves approaching an Ayrshire peasant, who could make rhymes, and to whom their notice was an honour, found themselves speedily overawed by the presence of a man who bore himself with dignity, and who possessed a singular power of correcting forwardness and of repelling intrusion. But though jealous of the respect due to himself, Burns never enforced it where he saw it was willingly paid; and, though inaccessible to the approaches of pride, he was open to every advance of kindness and of benevolence. His dark and haughty countenance easily relaxed into

into a look of good-will, of pity, or of tenderness; and, as the various emotions succeeded each other in his mind, assumed with equal ease the expression of the broadest humour, of the most extravagant mirth, of the deepest melancholy, or of the most sublime emotion. The tones of his voice happily corresponded with the expression of his features, and with the feelings of his mind. When to these endowments are added a rapid and distinct apprehension, a most powerful understanding, and a happy command of language—of strength as well as brilliancy of expression—we shall be able to account for the extraordinary attractions of his conversation—for the sorcery which in his social parties he seemed to exert on all around him. In the company of women this sorcery was more especially apparent. Their presence charmed the fiend of melancholy in his bosom, and awoke his happiest feelings; it excited the powers of his fancy, as well as the tenderness of his heart; and, by restraining the vehemence and the exuberance of his language, at times gave to his manners the impression of taste, and even of elegance, which in the company of men they seldom possessed. This influence was doubtless reciprocal. A Scottish Lady, accustomed to the best society, declared with characteristic *naiveté*, that no man's conversation ever *carried her so completely off her feet* as that of Burns; and

and an English Lady, familiarly acquainted with several of the most distinguished characters of the present times, assured the editor, that in the happiest of his social hours, there was a charm about Burns which she had never seen equalled. This charm arose not more from the power than the versatility of his genius. No languor could be felt in the society of a man who passed at pleasure from *grave to gay*, from the ludicrous to the pathetic, from the simple to the sublime; who wielded all his faculties with equal strength and ease, and never failed to impress the offspring of his fancy with the stamp of his understanding.

This, indeed, is to represent Burns in his happiest phasis. In large and mixed parties he was often silent and dark, sometimes fierce and overbearing; he was jealous of the proud man's scorn, jealous to an extreme of the insolence of wealth, and prone to avenge, even on its innocent possessor, the partiality of fortune. By nature kind, brave, sincere, and in a singular degree compassionate, he was on the other hand proud, irascible, and vindictive. His virtues and his failings had their origin in the extraordinary sensibility of his mind, and equally partook of the chills and glows of sentiment. His friendships were liable to interruption from jealousy or disgust, and his enmities died away under

under the influence of pity or self-accusation. His understanding was equal to the other powers of his mind, and his deliberate opinions were singularly candid and just; but, like other men of great and irregular genius, the opinions which he delivered in conversation were often the offspring of temporary feelings, and widely different from the calm decisions of his judgment. This was not merely true respecting the characters of others, but in regard to some of the most important points of human speculation.

On no subject did he give a more striking proof of the strength of his understanding, than in the correct estimate he formed of himself. He knew his own failings; he predicted their consequence; the melancholy foreboding was never long absent from his mind; yet his passions carried him down the stream of error, and swept him over the precipice he saw directly in his course. The fatal defect in his character lay in the comparative weakness of his volition, that superior faculty of the mind, which governing the conduct according to the dictates of the understanding, alone entitles it to be denominated rational; which is the parent of fortitude, patience, and self-denial; which, by regulating and combining human exertions, may be said to have effected all that is great in the works of man, in literature, in science, or on the

the face of nature. The occupations of a poet are not calculated to strengthen the governing powers of the mind, or to weaken that sensibility which requires perpetual control, since it gives birth to the vehemence of passion as well as to the higher powers of imagination. Unfortunately the favourite occupations of genius are calculated to increase all its peculiarities; to nourish that lofty pride which disdains the littleness of prudence, and the restrictions of order; and, by indulgence, to increase that sensibility which, in the present form of our existence, is scarcely compatible with peace or happiness, even when accompanied with the choicest gifts of fortune!

It is observed by one who was a friend and associate of Burns,* and who has contemplated and explained the system of animated nature, that no sentient being with mental powers greatly superior to those of men, could possibly live and be happy in this world.—"If such a being really existed," continues he, "his misery would be extreme. With senses more delicate and refined; with perceptions more acute and penetrating; with a taste so exquisite that the objects around him would by no means gratify it;

* Smellie—See his *Philosophy of Natural History, vol.* i. *p.* 526.

it; obliged to feed on nourishment too gross for his frame; he must be born only to be miserable, and the continuation of his existence would be utterly impossible. Even in our present condition, the sameness and the insipidity of objects and pursuits, the futility of pleasure, and the infinite sources of excruciating pain, are supported with great difficulty by cultivated and refined minds. Increase our sensibilities, continue the same objects and situation, and no man could bear to live."

Thus it appears, that our powers of sensation as well as all our other powers, are adapted to the scene of our existence; that they are limited in mercy, as well as in wisdom.

The speculations of Mr. Smellie are not to be considered as the dreams of a theorist; they were probably founded on sad experience. The being he supposes, " with senses more delicate and refined, with perceptions more acute and penetrating," is to be found in real life. He is of the temperament of genius, and perhaps a poet. Is there, then, no remedy for this inordinate sensibility? Are there no means by which the happiness of one so constituted by nature may be consulted? Perhaps it will be found, that regular and constant occupation, irksome though it may at first be, is the true remedy.

Occupation

Occupation in which the powers of the understanding are exercised, will diminish the force of external impressions, and keep the imagination under restraint.

That the bent of every man's mind should be followed in his education and in his destination in life, is a maxim which has been often repeated, but which cannot be admitted without many restrictions. It may be generally true when applied to weak minds, which being capable of little, must be encouraged and strengthened in the feeble impulses by which that little is produced. But where indulgent nature has bestowed her gifts with a liberal hand, the very reverse of this maxim ought frequently to be the rule of conduct. In minds of a higher order, the object of instruction and of discipline is very often to restrain rather than to impel; to curb the impulses of imagination, so that the passions also may be kept under control.*

Hence

* Quinctilian discusses the important question, whether the bent of the individual's genius should be followed in his education *(an secundum sui quisque ingenii docendus sit naturam)*, chiefly, indeed, with a reference to the orator, but in a way that admits of very general application. His conclusions coincide very much with those of the text. *An vero Isocrates cum de Ephoro atque Theopompo sic judicaret, ut* ALTERI FRENIS, ALTERI CALCARIBUS

Hence the advantages, even in a moral point of view, of studies of a severer nature, which, while they inform the understanding, employ the volition, that regulating power of the mind, which, like all our other faculties, is strengthened by exercise, and on the superiority of which, virtue, happiness, and honourable fame, are wholly dependent. Hence also the advantage of regular and constant application, which aids the voluntary power by the production of habits so necessary to the support of order and virtue, and so difficult to be formed in the temperament of genius.

The man who is so endowed and so regulated, may pursue his course with confidence in almost any of the various walks of life which choice or accident may open to him; and, provided he employs the talents he has cultivated, may hope for such imperfect happiness, and such limited success, as are reasonably to be expected from human exertions.

The

CARIBUS OPUS ESSE *diceret; aut in illo lentiore tarditatem, aut in illo pene præcipiti concitationem adjuvandum docendo existimavit? cum alterum alterius natura miscendum arbitraretur. Imbecillis tamen ingeniis sane sic obsequendum sit, ut tantum in id quo vocat natura, ducantur. Ita enim, quod solum possunt, melius efficient.*
Instit. Orator. lib. ii. 9.

The pre-eminence among men, which procures personal respect, and which terminates in lasting reputation, is seldom or never obtained by the excellence of a single faculty of mind. Experience teaches us, that it has been acquired by those only who have possessed the comprehension and the energy of general talents, and who have regulated their application, in the line which choice, or perhaps accident, may have determined, by the dictates of their judgment. Imagination is supposed, and with justice, to be the leading faculty of the poet. But what poet has stood the test of time by the force of this single faculty? Who does not see that Homer and Shakespeare excelled the rest of their species in understanding as well as in imagination; that they were pre-eminent in the highest species of knowledge—the knowledge of the nature and character of man? On the other hand, the talent of ratiocination is more especially requisite to the orator; but no man ever obtained the palm of oratory, even by the highest excellence in this single talent. Who does not perceive that Demosthenes and Cicero were not more happy in their addresses to the reason, than in their appeals to the passions? They knew, that to excite, to agitate, and to delight, are among the most potent arts of persuasion; and they enforced their impression on the understanding, by their command of all the sympathies

thies of the heart. These observations might be extended to other walks of life. He who has the faculties fitted to excel in poetry, has the faculties which, duly governed, and differently directed, might lead to pre-eminence in other, and, as far as respects himself, perhaps in happier destinations. The talents necessary to the construction of an Iliad, under different discipline and application, might have led armies to victory, or kingdoms to prosperity; might have wielded the thunder of eloquence, or discovered and enlarged the sciences that constitute the power and improve the condition of our species.* Such talents are, indeed, rare

* The reader must not suppose it is contended that the same individual could have excelled in all these directions. A certain degree of instruction and practice is necessary to excellence in every one, and life is too short to admit of one man, however great his talents, acquiring this in all of them. It is only asserted, that the same talents, differently applied, might have succeeded in *any one*, though, perhaps, not equally well in each. And, after all, this position requires certain limitations, which the reader's candour and judgment will supply. In supposing that a great poet might have made a great orator, the physical qualities necessary to oratory are pre-supposed. In supposing that a great orator might have made a great poet, it is a necessary condition, that he should have devoted himself to poetry, and that he should have acquired a proficiency

rare among the productions of nature, and occasions of bringing them into full exertion are rarer

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ciency in metrical numbers, which by patience and attention may be acquired, though the want of it has embarrassed and chilled many of the first efforts of true poetical genius. In supposing that Homer might have led armies to victory, more indeed is assumed than the physical qualities of a general. To these must be added that hardihood of mind, that coolness in the midst of difficulty and danger, which great poets and orators are found sometimes, but not always, to possess. The nature of the institutions of Greece and Rome produced more instances of single individuals who excelled in various departments of active and speculative life, than occur in modern Europe, where the employments of men are more subdivided. Many of the greatest warriors of antiquity excelled in literature and in oratory. That they had the *minds* of great poets also, will be admitted, when the qualities are justly appreciated which are necessary to excite, combine, and command the active energies of a great body of men, to rouse that enthusiasm which sustains fatigue, hunger, and the inclemencies of the elements, and which triumphs over the fear of death, the most powerful instinct of our nature.

The authority of Cicero may be appealed to in favour of the close connexion between the poet and the orator. *Est enim finitimus oratori poeta, numeris adstrictior paulo, verborum autem licentia liberior, &c.* De Orator. Lib. i. c. 16. See also Lib. iii. c. 7.—

rarer still. But safe and salutary occupations may be found for men of genius in every direction,

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It is true the example of Cicero may be quoted against his opinion. His attempts in verse, which are praised by Plutarch, do not seem to have met the approbation of Juvenal, or of some others. Cicero probably did not take sufficient time to learn the art of the poet; but that he had the *afflatus* necessary to poetical excellence, may be abundantly proved from his compositions in prose. On the other hand, nothing is more clear, than that, in the character of a great poet, all the mental qualities of an orator are included. It is said by Quinctilian, of Homer, *Omnibus eloquentiæ partibus exemplum et ortum dedit.* Lib. i. 47. The study of Homer is therefore recommended to the orator, as of the first importance. Of the two sublime poets in our own language, who are hardly inferior to Homer, Shakespeare and Milton, a similar recommendation may be given. It is scarcely necessary to mention how much an acquaintance with them has availed the great orator who is now the pride and ornament of the English bar, a character that may be appealed to with singular propriety, when we are contending for the universality of genius.

The identity, or at least the great similarity, of the talents necessary to *excellence* in poetry, oratory, painting, and war, will be admitted by some, who will be inclined to dispute the extension of the position to science or natural knowledge. On this occasion I may quote the following observations of Sir William Jones, whose

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tion, while the useful and ornamental arts remain to be cultivated, while the sciences remain to be studied and to be extended, and the principles of science to be applied to the correction and improvement of art. In the temperament of sensibility, which is in truth the temperament of general talents, the principal object of discipline and instruction is, as has already been mentioned, to strengthen the self-command; and this may be promoted by the direction of the studies, more effectually perhaps than has been generally understood.

If these observations be founded in truth,

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own example will however far exceed in weight the authority of his precepts. "Abul Ola had so flourishing a reputation, that several persons of uncommon genius were ambitious of learning the *art of poetry* from so able an instructor. His most illustrious scholars were Feleki and Khakani, who were no less eminent for their Persian compositions, than for their skill in every branch of pure and mixed mathematics, and particularly in astronomy; a striking proof that a sublime poet may become master of any kind of learning which he chooses to profess; since a fine imagination, a lively wit, an easy and copious style, cannot possibly obstruct the acquisition of any science whatever; but must necessarily assist him in his studies, and shorten his labour."

Sir William Jones's Works, vol. ii. *p.* 317.

they may lead to practical consequences of some importance. It has been too much the custom to consider the possession of poetical talents as excluding the possibility of application to the severer branches of study, and as in some degree incapacitating the possessor from attaining those habits, and from bestowing that attention, which are necessary to success in the details of business, and in the engagements of active life. It has been common for persons conscious of such talents, to look with a sort of disdain on other kinds of intellectual excellence, and to consider themselves as in some degree absolved from those rules of prudence by which humbler minds are restricted. They are too much disposed to abandon themselves to their own sensations, and to suffer life to pass away without regular exertion, or settled purpose.

But though men of genius are generally prone to indolence, with them indolence and unhappiness are in a more especial manner allied. The unbidden splendours of imagination may indeed at times irradiate the gloom which inactivity produces; but such visions, though bright, are transient, and serve to cast the realities of life into deeper shade. In bestowing great talents, Nature seems very generally to have imposed on the possessor the necessity of

of exertion, if he would escape wretchedness. Better for him than sloth, toils the most painful, or adventures the most hazardous. Happier to him than idleness, were the condition of the peasant, earning with incessant labour his scanty food; or that of the sailor, though hanging on the yard-arm, and wrestling with the hurricane.

These observations might be amply illustrated by the biography of men of genius of every denomination, and more especially by the biography of the poets. Of this last description of men, few seem to have enjoyed the usual portion of happiness that falls to the lot of humanity, those excepted who have cultivated poetry as an elegant amusement in the hours of relaxation from other occupations, or the small number who have engaged with success in the greater or more arduous attempts of the muse, in which all the faculties of the mind have been fully and permanently employed. Even taste, virtue, and comparative independence, do not seem capable of bestowing on men of genius, peace and tranquillity, without such occupation as may give regular and healthful exercise to the faculties of body and mind. The amiable Shenstone has left us the records of his imprudence, of his indolence, and of his unhappiness, amidst

amidst the shades of the Leasowes;* and the virtues, the learning, and the genius of Gray, equal to the loftiest attempts of the epic muse, failed to procure him in the academic bowers of Cambridge, that tranquillity and that respect which less fastidiousness of taste, and greater constancy and vigour of exertion, would have doubtless obtained.

It is more necessary that men of genius should be aware of the importance of self-command, and of exertion, because their indolence is peculiarly exposed, not merely to unhappiness, but to diseases of mind, and to errors of conduct, which are generally fatal. This interesting subject deserves a particular investigation; but we must content ourselves with one or two cursory remarks. Relief is sometimes sought from the melancholy of indolence in practices, which for a time sooth and gratify the sensations, but which in the end involve the sufferer in darker gloom. To command the external circumstances by which happiness is affected, is not in human power; but there are various substances in nature which operate on the system of the nerves, so as to give a fictitious

* See his Letters, which, as a display of the effects of poetical idleness, are highly instructive.

tious gaiety to the ideas of imagination, and to alter the effect of the external impressions which we receive. Opium is chiefly employed for this purpose by the disciples of Mahomet and the inhabitants of Asia; but alcohol, the principle of intoxication in vinous and spirituous liquors, is preferred in Europe, and is universally used in the Christian world.* Under the various

* There are a great number of other substances, which may be considered under this point of view—Tobacco, tea, and coffee, are of the number. These substances essentially differ from each other in their qualities; and an inquiry into the particular effects of each on the health, morals, and happiness, of those who use them, would be curious and useful. The effects of wine and of opium on the temperament of sensibility, the Editor intended to have discussed in this place at some length; but he found the subject too extensive and too professional to be introduced with propriety. The difficulty of abandoning any of these narcotics (if we may so term them), when inclination is strengthened by habit, is well known. Johnson, in his distresses, had experienced the cheering but treacherous influence of wine, and, by a powerful effort, abandoned it. He was obliged however to use tea as a substitute, and this was the solace to which he constantly had recourse under his habitual melancholy. The praises of wine form many of the most beautiful lyrics of the poets of Greece and Rome, and of modern Europe. Whether opium, which produces visions still more

various wounds to which indolent sensibility is exposed, and under the gloomy apprehensions respecting futurity to which it is so often a prey, how strong is the temptation to have recourse to an antidote by which the pain of these wounds is suspended, by which the heart is exhilarated, visions of happiness are excited in the mind, and the forms of external nature clothed with new beauty!

Elysium opens round,
A pleasing phrenzy buoys the lighten'd soul,
And sanguine hopes dispel your fleeting care;
And what was difficult, and what was dire,
Yields to your prowess, and superior stars:
The happiest you of all that e'er were mad,
Or are, or shall be, could this folly last.
But soon your heaven is gone; a heavier gloom
Shuts o'er your head——

* * *

——Morning

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more ecstatic, has been the theme of the eastern poets, I do not know. Wine is drunk in small quantities at a time, in company, where *for a time*, it promotes harmony and social affection. Opium is swallowed by the Asiatics in full doses at once, and the inebriate retires to the solitary indulgence of his delirious imaginations. Hence, the wine-drinker appears in a superior light to the imbiber of opium, a distinction which he owes more to the *form*, than to the *quality* of his liquor.

———Morning comes; your cares return
With tenfold rage. An anxious stomach well
May be endured: so may the throbbing head:
But such a dim delirium, such a dream
Involves you; such a dastardly despair
Unmans your soul, as madd'ning Pentheus felt,
When, baited round Cithæron's cruel sides,
He saw two suns and double Thebes ascend.
Armstrong's Art of Preserving Health, b. iv. *l.* 163.

Such are the pleasures and the pains of intoxication, as they occur in the temperament of sensibility, described by a genuine poet, with a degree of truth and energy which nothing but experience could have dictated. There are indeed some individuals of this temperament on whom wine produces no cheering influence. On some, even in very moderate quantities, its effects are painfully irritating; in large draughts it excites dark and melancholy ideas; and in draughts still larger, the fierceness of insanity itself. Such men are happily exempted from a temptation, to which experience teaches us the finest dispositions often yield, and the influence of which, when strengthened by habit, it is a humiliating truth, that the most powerful minds have not been able to resist.

It is the more necessary for men of genius to be on their guard against the habitual use of wine, because it is apt to steal on them insensibly;

sibly; and because the temptation to excess usually presents itself to them in their social hours, when they are alive only to warm and generous emotions, and when prudence and moderation are often contemned as selfishness and timidity.

It is the more necessary for them to guard against excess in the use of wine, because on them its effects are, physically and morally, in an especial manner injurious. In proportion to its stimulating influence on the system (on which the pleasurable sensations depend), is the debility that ensues; a debility that destroys digestion, and terminates in habitual fever, dropsy, jaundice, paralysis, or insanity. As the strength of the body decays, the volition fails; in proportion as the sensations are soothed and gratified, the sensibility increases; and morbid sensibility is the parent of indolence, because, while it impairs the regulating power of the mind, it exaggerates all the obstacles to exertion. Activity, perseverance, and self-command, become more and more difficult, and the great purposes of utility, patriotism, or of honourable ambition, which had occupied the imagination, die away in fruitless resolutions, or in feeble efforts.

To apply these observations to the subject of our

our memoirs, would be an useless as well as a painful task. It is, indeed, a duty we owe to the living, not to allow our admiration of great genius, or even our pity for its unhappy destiny, to conceal or disguise its errors. But there are sentiments of respect, and even of tenderness, with which this duty should be performed; there is an awful sanctity which invests the mansions of the dead; and let those who moralize over the graves of their contemporaries, reflect with humility on their own errors, nor forget how soon they may themselves require the candour and the sympathy they are called upon to bestow.

SOON after the death of Burns, the following article appeared in the Dumfries Journal, from which it was copied into the Edinburgh newspapers, and into various other periodical publications. It is from the elegant pen of a lady already alluded to in the course of these memoirs,* whose exertions for the family of our bard, in the circles of literature and fashion in which she moves, have done her so much honour.

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* *See p. 220.*

"THE attention of the public seems to be much occupied at present with the loss it has recently sustained in the death of the Caledonian poet Robert Burns; a loss calculated to be severely felt throughout the literary world, as well as lamented in the narrower sphere of private friendship. It was not therefore probable that such an event should be long unattended with the accustomed profusion of posthumous anecdotes and memoirs which are usually circulated immediately after the death of every rare and celebrated personage: I had however conceived no intention of appropriating to myself the privilege of criticising Burns's writings and character, or of anticipating on the province of a biographer.

"Conscious indeed of my own inability to do justice to such a subject, I should have continued wholly silent, had misrepresentation and calumny been less industrious; but a regard to truth, no less than affection for the memory of a friend, must now justify my offering to the public a few at least of those observations which an intimate acquaintance with Burns, and the frequent opportunities I have had of observing equally his happy qualities and his failings for several years past, have enabled me to communicate.

"It will actually be an injustice done to Burns's character, not only by future generations and foreign countries, but even by his native Scotland, and perhaps a number of his contemporaries, that he is generally talked of, and considered, with reference to his poetical talents *only:* for the fact is, even allowing his great and original genius its due tribute of admiration, that poetry (I appeal to all who have had the advantage of being personally acquainted with him) was actually not his *forte.* Many others, perhaps, may have ascended to prouder heights in the region of Parnassus, but none certainly ever outshone Burns in the charms—the sorcery, I would almost call it, of fascinating conversation, the spontaneous eloquence of social argument, or the unstudied poignancy of brilliant repartee; nor was any man, I believe, ever gifted with a larger portion of the '*vivida vis animi.*' His personal endowments were perfectly correspondent to the qualifications of his mind; his form was manly; his action, energy itself; devoid in great measure perhaps of those graces, of that polish, acquired only in the refinement of societies where in early life he could have no opportunities of mixing; but where such was the irresistible power of attraction that encircled him, though his appearance and manners were always peculiar, he never failed to delight and to excel. His figure seemed to bear

bear testimony to his earlier destination and employments. It seemed rather moulded by nature for the rough exercises of Agriculture, than the gentler cultivation of the Belles Lettres. His features were stamped with the hardy character of independence, and the firmness of conscious, though not arrogant, pre-eminence; the animated expressions of countenance were almost peculiar to himself; the rapid lightnings of his eye were always the harbingers of some flash of genius, whether they darted the fiery glances of insulted and indignant superiority, or beamed with the impassioned sentiment of fervent and impetuous affections. His voice alone could improve upon the magic of his eye: sonorous, replete with the finest modulations, it alternately captivated the ear with the melody of poetic numbers, the perspicuity of nervous reasoning, or the ardent sallies of enthusiastic patriotism. The keenness of satire was, I am almost at a loss whether to say, his forte or his foible; for though nature had endowed him with a portion of the most pointed excellence in that dangerous talent, he suffered it too often to be the vehicle of personal, and sometimes unfounded, animosities. It was not always that sportiveness of humour, that 'unwary pleasantry,' which *Sterne* has depicted with touches so conciliatory, but the darts of ridicule were frequently directed as the caprice

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of the instant suggested, or as the altercations of parties and of persons happened to kindle the restlessness of his spirit into interest or aversion. This, however, was not invariably the case; his wit (which is no unusual matter indeed) had always the start of his judgment, and would lead him to the indulgence of raillery uniformly acute, but often unaccompanied with the least desire to wound. The suppression of an arch and full-pointed bon-mot, from a dread of offending its object, the sage of Zurich very properly classes as a virtue *only to be sought for in the Calendar of Saints;* if so, Burns must not be too severely dealt with for being rather deficient in it. He paid for his mischievous wit as dearly as any one could do. 'Twas no extravagant arithmetic,' to say of him, as was said of Yorick, that 'for every ten jokes he got an hundred enemies;' but much allowance will be made by a candid mind for the splenetic warmth of a spirit whom 'distress had spited with the world,' and which, unbounded in its intellectual sallies and pursuits, continually experienced the curbs imposed by the waywardness of his fortune. The vivacity of his wishes and temper was indeed checked by almost habitual disappointments, which sat heavy on a heart that acknowledged the ruling passion of independence, without having ever been placed beyond the grasp of penury. His soul was never

never languid or inactive, and his genius was extinguished only with the last spark of retreating life. His passions rendered him, according as they disclosed themselves in affection or antipathy, an object of enthusiastic attachment, or of decided enmity; for *he* possessed none of that negative insipidity of character, whose love might be regarded with indifference, or whose resentment could be considered with contempt. In this, it should seem, the temper of his associates took the tincture from his own; for *he* acknowledged in the universe but two classes of objects, those of adoration the most fervent, or of aversion the most uncontrolable; and it has been frequently a reproach to him, that, unsusceptible of indifference, often hating where he ought only to have despised, he alternately opened his heart and poured forth the treasures of his understanding to such as were incapable of appreciating the homage; and elevated to the privileges of an adversary, some who were unqualified in all respects for the honour of a contest so distinguished.

" It is said that the celebrated Dr. Johnson professed to ' love a good hater,'—a temperament that would have singularly adapted him to cherish a prepossession in favour of our bard, who perhaps fell but little short even of the surly Doctor in this qualification, as long as the disposition

position to ill-will continued; but the warmth of his passions was fortunately corrected by their versatility. He was seldom, indeed never, implacable in his resentments, and sometimes, it has been alleged, not inviolably faithful in his engagements of friendship. Much indeed has been said about his inconstancy and caprice; but I am inclined to believe, that they originated less in a levity of sentiment, than from an extreme impetuosity of feeling, which rendered him prompt to take umbrage; and his sensations of pique, where he fancied he had discovered the traces of neglect, scorn, or unkindness, took their measure of asperity from the overflowings of the opposite sentiment which preceded them, and which seldom failed to regain its ascendency in his bosom on the return of calmer reflection. He was candid and manly in the avowal of his errors, and *his avowal* was a *reparation.* His native *fierté* never forsaking him for a moment, the value of a frank acknowledgment was enhanced tenfold towards a generous mind, from its never being attended with servility. His mind, organized only for the stronger and more acute operations of the passions, was impracticable to the efforts of superciliousness that would have depressed it into humility, and equally superior to the encroachments of venal suggestions that might have led him into the mazes of hypocrisy.

"It has been observed, that he was far from averse to the incense of flattery, and could receive it tempered with less delicacy than might have been expected, as he seldom transgressed extravagantly in that way himself; where he paid a compliment, it might indeed claim the power of intoxication, as approbation from him was always an honest tribute from the warmth and sincerity of his heart. It has been sometimes represented by those who it should seem had a view to depreciate, though they could not hope wholly to obscure that native brilliancy, which the powers of this extraordinary man had invariably bestowed on every thing that came from his lips or pen, that the history of the Ayrshire ploughboy was an ingenious fiction, fabricated for the purposes of obtaining the interests of the great, and enhancing the merits of what in reality required no foil. The Cotter's Saturday Night, Tam O'Shanter, and the Mountain Daisy, besides a number of later productions, where the maturity of his genius will be readily traced, and which will be given to the public as soon as his friends have collected and arranged them, speak sufficiently for themselves; and had they fallen from a hand more dignified in the ranks of society than that of a peasant, they had perhaps bestowed as unusual a grace there, as even in the humbler shade of rustic inspiration from whence they really sprung.

"To

" To the obscure scene of Burns's education, and to the laborious, though honourable station of rural industry, in which his parentage enrolled him, almost every inhabitant of the south of Scotland can give testimony. His only surviving brother, Gilbert Burns, now guides the ploughshare of his forefathers in Ayrshire, at a farm near Mauchline;* and our poet's eldest son (a lad of nine years of age, whose early dispositions already prove him to be in some measure the inheritor of his father's talents as well as indigence), has been destined by his family to the humble employments of the loom.†

" That Burns had received no classical education, and was acquainted with the Greek and Roman authors only through the medium of translations, is a fact of which all who were in the habits of conversing with him might readily be convinced. I have indeed seldom observed him to be at a loss in conversation, unless where the dead languages and their writers have been the subjects of discussion. When I have pressed him to tell me, why he never applied himself

* This very respectable and very superior man is now removed to Dumfries-shire. He rents lands on the estate of Closeburn, and is a tenant of the venerable Dr. Monteith. (1800.) E.

† This destination is now altered. (1800.) E.

self to acquire the Latin, in particular, a language which his happy memory would have so soon enabled him to be master of, he used only to reply with a smile, that he had already learnt all the Latin he desired to know, and that was, *omnia vincit amor;* a sentence, that from his writings and most favourite pursuits, it should undoubtedly seem that he was most thoroughly versed in; but I really believe his classic erudition extended little, if any, further.

" The penchant Burns had uniformly acknowledged for the festive pleasures of the table, and towards the fairer and softer objects of nature's creation, has been the rallying point from whence the attacks of his censors have been uniformly directed; and to these, it must be confessed, he shewed himself no stoic. His poetical pieces blend with alternate happiness of description, the frolic spirit of the flowing bowl, or melt the heart to the tender and impassioned sentiments in which beauty always taught him to pour forth his own. But who would wish to reprove the feelings he has consecrated with such lively touches of nature? And where is the rugged moralist who will persuade us so far to " chill the genial current of the soul," as to regret that Ovid ever celebrated his Corinna, or that Anacreon sung beneath his vine?

" I will

" I will not however undertake to be the apologist of the irregularities even of a man of genius, though I believe it is as certain that genius never was free from irregularities, as that their absolution may in great measure be justly claimed, since it is perfectly evident that the world had continued very stationary in its intellectual acquirements, had it never given birth to any but men of plain sense. Evenness of conduct, and a due regard to the decorums of the world, have been so rarely seen to move hand in hand with genius, that some have gone as far as to say, though there I cannot wholly acquiesce, that they are even incompatible ; besides, the frailties that cast their shade over the splendour of superior merit, are more conspicuously glaring than where they are the attendants of mere mediocrity. It is only on the gem we are disturbed to see the dust; the pebble may be soiled, and we never regard it. The eccentric intuitions of genius too often yield the soul to the wild effervescence of desires, always unbounded, and sometimes equally dangerous to the repose of others as fatal to its own. No wonder then if virtue herself be sometimes lost in the blaze of kindling animation, or that the calm monitions of reason are not invariably found sufficient to fetter an imagination, which scorns the narrow limits and restrictions that would chain it to the level of ordinary minds. The child of nature, the child of sensibility, unschooled

schooled in the rigid precepts of philosophy, too often unable to control the passions which proved a source of frequent errors and misfortunes to him, Burns made his own artless apology in language more impressive than all the argumentatory vindications in the world could do, in one of his own poems, where he delineates the gradual expansion of his mind to the lessons of the "tutelary muse," who concludes an address to her pupil, almost unique for simplicity and beautiful poetry, with these lines;

"I saw thy pulse's madd'ning play
Wild send thee pleasure's devious way;
Misled by Fancy's meteor ray,
By passion driven;
But yet the light that led astray,
Was *light from heaven!*"*

"I have already transgressed beyond the bounds I had proposed to myself, on first committing this sketch to paper, which comprehends what at least I have been led to deem the leading features of Burns's mind and character: a literary critique I do not aim at; mine is wholly fulfilled, if in these pages I have been able to delineate any of those strong traits that distinguished

* Vide the Vision—Duan 2d.

distinguished him, of those talents which raised him from the plough, where he passed the bleak morning of his life, weaving his rude wreaths of poesy with the wild field-flowers that sprang around his cottage, to that enviable eminence of literary fame, where Scotland will long cherish his memory with delight and gratitude; and proudly remember, that beneath her cold sky a genius was ripened, without care or culture, that would have done honour to climes more favourable to those luxuriances—that warmth of colouring and fancy in which he so eminently excelled.

" From several paragraphs I have noticed in the public prints, ever since the idea of sending this sketch to some one of them was formed, I find private animosities have not yet subsided, and that envy has not yet exhausted all her shafts. I still trust, however, that honest fame will be permanently affixed to Burns's character, which I think it will be found he *has* merited by the candid and impartial among his countrymen. And where a recollection of the imprudences that sullied his brighter qualifications interpose, let the imperfection of all human excellence be remembered at the same time, leaving those inconsistencies, which alternately exalted his nature into the seraph, and sunk it again into the man, to the tribunal which *alone* can

can investigate the labyrinths of the human heart—

> ‘ Where they alike in trembling hope *repose*,
> —The bosom of his father and his *God*.’
>
> “ GRAY’S ELEGY.

“ *Annandale, Aug.* 7, 1796.”

AFTER this account of the life and personal character of Burns, it may be expected that some inquiry should be made into his literary merits. It will not however be necessary to enter very minutely into this investigation. If fiction be, as some suppose, the soul of poetry, no one had ever less pretensions to the name of poet than Burns. Though he has displayed great powers of imagination, yet the subjects on which he has written, are seldom, if ever imaginary; his poems, as well as his letters, may be considered as the effusions of his sensibility, and the transcript of his own musings on the real incidents of his humble life. If we add, that they also contain most happy delineations of the characters, manners, and scenery that presented themselves to his observation, we shall include almost all the subjects of his muse. His writings may therefore be regarded as affording a great part of the data on which our account of his personal character has been founded; and

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most of the observations we have applied to the man, are applicable, with little variation, to the poet.

The impression of his birth, and of his original station in life, was not more evident on his form and manners, than on his poetical productions. The incidents which form the subjects of his poems, though some of them highly interesting, and susceptible of poetical imagery, are incidents in the life of a peasant who takes no pains to disguise the lowliness of his condition, or to throw into shade the circumstances attending it, which more feeble or more artificial minds would have endeavoured to conceal. The same rudeness and inattention appears in the formation of his rhymes, which are frequently incorrect, while the measure in which many of the poems are written has little of the pomp or harmony of modern versification, and is indeed to an English ear, strange and uncouth. The greater part of his earlier poems are written in the dialect of his country, which is obscure, if not unintelligible to Englishmen, and which, though it still adheres more or less to the speech of almost every Scotchman, all the polite and the ambitious are now endeavouring to banish from their tongues as well as their writings. The use of it in composition naturally therefore calls up ideas of vulgarity in the mind. These singularities

gūlarities are increased by the character of the poet, who delights to express himself with a simplicity that approaches to nakedness, and with an unmeasured energy that often alarms delicacy, and sometimes offends taste. Hence, in approaching him, the first impression is perhaps repulsive: there is an air of coarseness about him, which is difficultly reconciled with our established notions of poetical excellence.

As the reader however becomes better acquainted with the poet, the effects of his peculiarities lessen. He perceives in his poems, even on the lowest subjects, expressions of sentiment, and delineations of manners, which are highly interesting. The scenery he describes is evidently taken from real life; the characters he introduces, and the incidents he relates, have the impression of nature and truth. His humour, though wild and unbridled, is irresistibly amusing, and is sometimes heightened in its effects by the introduction of emotions of tenderness, with which genuine humour so happily unites. Nor is this the extent of his power. The reader, as he examines farther, discovers that the poet is not confined to the descriptive, the humorous, or the pathetic: he is found, as occasion offers, to rise with ease into the terrible and the sublime. Every where he appears devoid of artifice, performing what he attempts with

with little apparent effort; and impressing on the offspring of *his fancy the stamp of his understanding*. The reader, capable of forming a just estimate of poetical talents, discovers in these circumstances marks of uncommon genius, and is willing to investigate more minutely its nature and its claims to originality. This last point we shall examine first.

That Burns had not the advantages of a classical education, or of any degree of acquaintance with the Greek or Roman writers in their original dress, has appeared in the history of his life. He acquired indeed some knowledge of the French language, but it does not appear that he was ever much conversant in French literature, nor is there any evidence of his having derived any of his poetical stores from that source. With the English classics he became well acquainted in the course of his life, and the effects of this acquaintance are observable in his latter productions; but the character and style of his poetry were formed very early, and the model which he followed, in as far as he can be said to have had one, is to be sought for in the works of the poets who have written in the Scottish dialect—in the works of such of them more especially, as are familiar to the peasantry of Scotland. Some observations on these may form a proper introduction to a more particular examination

examination of the poetry of Burns. The studies of the Editor in this direction are indeed very recent and very imperfect. It would have been imprudent for him to have entered on this subject at all, but for the kindness of Mr. Ramsay of Ochtertyre, whose assistance he is proud to acknowledge, and to whom the reader must ascribe whatever is of any value in the following imperfect sketch of literary compositions in the Scottish idiom.

It is a circumstance not a little curious, and which does not seem to be satisfactorily explained, that in the thirteenth century, the language of the two British nations, if at all different, differed only in dialect, the Gaelic in the one, like the Welch and Armoric in the other, being confined to the mountainous districts.* The English under the Edwards, and the Scots under Wallace and Bruce, spoke the same language. We may observe also, that in Scotland the history of poetry ascends to a period nearly as remote as in England. Barbour, and Blind Harry, James the First, Dunbar, Douglas, and Lindsay, who lived in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, were coeval with the fathers of poetry in England; and in the opinion of Mr. Wharton,

* *Historical Essay on Scottish Song, p.* 20, by Mr. Ritson.

Wharton, not inferior to them in genius or in composition. Though the language of the two countries gradually deviated from each other during this period, yet the difference on the whole was not considerable; not perhaps greater than between the different dialects of the different parts of England in our own time.

At the death of James the Fifth, in 1542, the language of Scotland was in a flourishing condition, wanting only writers in prose equal to those in verse. Two circumstances, propitious on the whole, operated to prevent this. The first was the passion of the Scots for composition in Latin; and the second, the accession of James the Sixth to the English throne. It may easily be imagined, that if Buchanan had devoted his admirable talents, even in part, to the cultivation of his native tongue, as was done by the revivers of letters in Italy, he would have left compositions in that language which might have incited other men of genius to have followed his example,* and given duration to the language itself. The union of the two crowns in the person of James, overthrew all reasonable expectation of this kind. That monarch, seated on the English throne, would no longer

* *e. g.* The Authors of the *Deliciæ Poetarum Scotorum, &c.*

longer suffer himself to be addressed in the rude dialect in which the Scottish clergy had so often insulted his dignity. He encouraged Latin or English only, both of which he prided himself on writing with purity, though he himself never could acquire the English pronunciation, but spoke with a Scottish idiom and intonation to the last.—Scotsmen of talents declined writing in their native language, which they knew was not acceptable to their learned and pedantic monarch, and at a time when national prejudice and enmity prevailed to a great degree, they disdained to study the niceties of the English tongue, though of so much easier acquisition than a dead language. Lord Stirling and Drummond of Hawthornden, the only Scotsmen who wrote poetry in those times, were exceptions. They studied the language of England, and composed in it with precision and elegance. They were however the last of their countrymen who deserved to be considered as poets in that century. The muses of Scotland sunk into silence, and did not again raise their voices for a period of eighty years.

To what causes are we to attribute this extreme depression among a people comparatively learned, enterprising, and ingenious? Shall we impute it to the fanaticism of the covenanters, or to the tyranny of the house of Stuart after their

their restoration to the throne? Doubtless these causes operated, but they seem unequal to account for the effect. In England, similar distractions and oppression took place, yet poetry flourished there in a remarkable degree. During this period, Cowley, and Waller, and Dryden sung, and Milton raised his strain of unparalleled grandeur. To the causes already mentioned, another must be added, in accounting for the torpor of Scottish literature—the want of a proper vehicle for men of genius to employ. The civil wars had frightened away the Latin muses, and no standard had been established of the Scottish tongue, which was deviating still farther from the pure English idiom.

The revival of literature in Scotland may be dated from the establishment of the union, or rather from the extinction of the rebellion in 1715. The nations being finally incorporated, it was clearly seen that their tongues must in the end incorporate also; or rather indeed that the Scottish language must degenerate into a provincial idiom, to be avoided by those who would aim at distinction in letters, or rise to eminence in the united legislature.

Soon after this, a band of men of genius appeared, who studied the English classics, and imitated

imitated their beauties, in the same manner as they studied the classics of Greece and Rome. They had admirable models of composition lately presented to them by the writers of the reign of Queen Anne; particularly in the periodical papers published by Steele, Addison, and their associated friends, which circulated widely through Scotland, and diffused every where a taste for purity of style and sentiment, and for critical disquisition. At length, the Scottish writers succeeded in English composition, and an union was formed of the literary talents, as well as of the legislatures of the two nations. On this occasion the poets took the lead. While Henry Home,* Dr. Wallace, and their learned associates, were only laying in their intellectual stores, and studying to clear themselves of their Scottish idioms, Thomson, Mallet, and Hamilton of Bangour, had made their appearance before the public, and been enrolled on the list of English poets. The writers in prose followed—a numerous and powerful band, and poured their ample stores into the general stream of British literature. Scotland possessed her four universities before the accession of James to the English throne. Immediately before the union, she acquired her parochial schools. These establishments combining

* Lord Kaims.

bining happily together, made the elements of knowledge of easy acquisition, and presented a direct path, by which the ardent student might be carried along into the recesses of science or learning. As civil broils ceased, and faction and prejudice gradually died away, a wider field was opened to literary ambition, and the influence of the Scottish institutions for instruction, on the productions of the press, became more and more apparent.

It seems indeed probable, that the establishment of the parochial schools produced effects on the rural muse of Scotland also, which have not hitherto been suspected, and which, though less splendid in their nature, are not however to be regarded as trivial, whether we consider the happiness or the morals of the people.

There is some reason to believe, that the original inhabitants of the British isles possessed a peculiar and an interesting species of music, which being banished from the plains by the successive invasions of the Saxons, Danes, and Normans, was preserved with the native race, in the wilds of Ireland and in the mountains of Scotland and Wales. The Irish, the Scottish, and the Welch music, differ indeed from each other, but the difference may be considered as in dialect only, and probably produced by the

influence of time, like the different dialects of their common language. If this conjecture be true, the Scottish music must be more immediately of a Highland origin, and the Lowland tunes, though now of a character somewhat distinct, must have descended from the mountains in remote ages. Whatever credit may be given to conjectures, evidently involved in great uncertainty, there can be no doubt that the Scottish peasantry have been long in possession of a number of songs and ballads composed in their native dialect, and sung to their native music. The subjects of these compositions were such as most interested the simple inhabitants, and in the succession of time varied probably as the condition of society varied. During the separation and the hostility of the two nations, these songs and ballads, as far as our imperfect documents enable us to judge, were chiefly warlike; such as the *Huntis of Cheviot*, and the *Battle of Harlaw*. After the union of the two crowns, when a certain degree of peace and of tranquillity took place, the rural muse of Scotland breathed in softer accents. "In the want of real evidence respecting the history of our songs," says Mr. Ramsay of Ochtertyre, "recourse may be had to conjecture. One would be disposed to think, that the most beautiful of the Scottish tunes were clothed with new words after the union of the crowns. The inhabitants

of

of the borders, who had formerly been warriors from choice, and husbandmen from necessity, either quitted the country, or were transformed into real shepherds, easy in their circumstances, and satisfied with their lot. Some sparks of that spirit of chivalry for which they are celebrated by Froissart, remained, sufficient to inspire elevation of sentiment and gallantry towards the fair sex. The familiarity and kindness which had long subsisted between the gentry and the peasantry, could not all at once be obliterated, and this connexion tended to sweeten rural life. In this state of innocence, ease, and tranquillity of mind, the love of poetry and music would still maintain its ground, though it would naturally assume a form congenial to the more peaceful state of society. The minstrels, whose metrical tales used once to rouse the borderers like the trumpet's sound, had been, by an order of the legislature (in 1579), classed with rogues and vagabonds, and attempted to be suppressed. Knox and his disciples influenced the Scottish parliament, but contended in vain with her rural muse. Amidst our Arcadian vales, probably on the banks of the Tweed, or some of its tributary streams, one or more original geniuses may have arisen, who were destined to give a new turn to the taste of their countrymen. They would see that the events and pursuits which chequer

private life were the proper subjects for popular poetry. Love, which had formerly held a divided sway with glory and ambition, became now the master-passion of the soul. To portray in lively and delicate colours, though with a hasty hand, the hopes and fears that agitate the breast of the love-sick swain, or forlorn maiden, affords ample scope to the rural poet. Love-songs, of which Tibullus himself would not have been ashamed, might be composed by an uneducated rustic with a slight tincture of letters; or if in these songs the character of the rustic be sometimes assumed, the truth of character, and the language of nature, are preserved. With unaffected simplicity and tenderness, topics are urged, most likely to soften the heart of a cruel and coy mistress, or to regain a fickle lover. Even in such as are of a melancholy cast, a ray of hope breaks through, and dispels the deep and settled gloom which characterizes the sweetest of the Highland *luenigs*, or vocal airs. Nor are these songs all plaintive; many of them are lively and humorous, and some appear to us coarse and indelicate. They seem, however, genuine descriptions of the manners of an energetic and sequestered people in their hours of mirth and festivity, though in their portraits some objects are brought into open view, which more fastidious painters would have thrown into shade.

"As

"As those rural poets sung for amusement, not for gain, their effusions seldom exceeded a love-song, or a ballad of satire or humour, which, like the works of the elder minstrels, were seldom committed to writing, but treasured up in the memory of their friends and neighbours. Neither known to the learned nor patronised by the great, these rustic bards lived and died in obscurity; and by a strange fatality, their story, and even their very names have been forgotten.* When proper models for pastoral songs were produced, there would be no want of imitators. To succeed in this species of composition, soundness of understanding and sensibility of heart were more requisite than flights of imagination or pomp of numbers. Great changes have certainly taken place in Scottish song-writing, though we cannot trace the steps of this change; and few of the pieces admired in Queen Mary's time are now to be discovered in modern collections. It is possible, though not probable, that the music may have remained nearly the same, though the

* In the Pepys collection, there are a few Scottish songs of the last century, but the names of the authors are not preserved.

the words to the tunes were entirely new-modelled."*

These conjectures are highly ingenious. It cannot, however, be presumed, that the state of ease and tranquillity described by Mr. Ramsay took place among the Scottish peasantry immediately on the union of the crowns, or indeed during the greater part of the seventeenth century. The Scottish nation, through all its ranks, was deeply agitated by the civil wars, and the religious persecutions which succeeded each other in that disastrous period; it was not till after the revolution in 1688, and the subsequent establishment of their beloved form of Church government, that the peasantry of the Lowlands enjoyed comparative repose; and it is since that period that a great number of the most-admired Scottish songs have been produced, though the tunes to which they are sung, are in general of much greater antiquity. It

* *Extract of a letter from Mr. Ramsay of Ochtertyre to the Editor, Sept.* 11, 1799. In the *Bee, vol.* ii. *p.* 201, is a communication of Mr. Ramsay, under the signature of J. Runcole, which enters into this subject somewhat more at large. In that paper he gives his reasons for questioning the antiquity of many of the most celebrated Scottish songs.

It is not unreasonable to suppose, that the peace and security derived from the Revolution, and the Union, produced a favourable change on the rustic poetry of Scotland; and it can scarcely be doubted, that the institution of parish-schools in 1696, by which a certain degree of instruction was diffused universally among the peasantry, contributed to this happy effect.

Soon after this appeared Allan Ramsay, the Scottish Theocritus. He was born on the high mountains that divide Clydesdale and Annandale, in a small hamlet by the banks of Glangonar, a stream which descends into the Clyde. The ruins of this hamlet are still shewn to the inquiring traveller.* He was the son of a peasant, and probably received such instruction as his parish-school bestowed, and the poverty of his parents admitted.† Ramsay made his appearance

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* *See Campbell's History of Poetry in Scotland, p.*185.

† The father of Ramsay was, it is said, a workman in the lead-mines of the Earl of Hopeton, at Lead-hills. The workmen in those mines at present are of a very superior character to miners in general. They have only six hours of labour in the day, and have time for reading. They have a common library, supported by contribution, containing several thousand volumes. When this

pearance in Edinburgh in the beginning of the present century, in the humble character of an apprentice to a barber, or peruke-maker; he was then fourteen or fifteen years of age. By degrees he acquired notice for his social disposition, and his talent for the composition of verses in the Scottish idiom; and, changing his profession for that of a bookseller, he became intimate with many of the literary, as well as of the gay and fashionable characters of his time.* Having published a volume of poems of his own in 1721, which was favourably received, he undertook to make a collection of ancient Scottish poems, under the title of the *Ever-Green*, and was afterwards encouraged to present to the world a collection of Scottish songs. "From what sources he procured them," says Mr. Ramsay of Ochtertyre, "whether from tradition or manuscript, is uncertain. As

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this was instituted I have not learnt. These miners are said to be of a very sober and moral character. Allan Ramsay, when very young, is supposed to have been a washer of ore in these mines.

* "He was coeval with Joseph Mitchell, and his club of *small* wits, who, about 1719, published a very poor miscellany, to which Dr. Young, the author of the *Night Thoughts*, prefixed a copy of verses." *Extract of a letter from Mr. Ramsay of Ochtertyre to the Editor.*

As in the *Ever-Green* he made some rash attempts to improve on the originals of his ancient poems, he probably used still greater freedom with the songs and ballads. The truth cannot, however, be known on this point, till manuscripts of the songs printed by him, more ancient than the present century, shall be produced, or access be obtained to his own papers, if they are still in existence. To several tunes which either wanted words, or had words that were improper or imperfect, he or his friends adapted verses worthy of the melodies they accompanied, worthy indeed of the golden age. These verses were perfectly intelligible to every rustic, yet justly admired by persons of taste, who regarded them as the genuine offspring of the pastoral muse. In some respects Ramsay had advantages not possessed by poets writing in the Scottish dialect in our days. Songs in the dialect of Cumberland or Lancashire could never be popular, because these dialects have never been spoken by persons of fashion. But till the middle of the present century, every Scotsman, from the peer to the peasant, spoke a truly Doric language. It is true the English moralists and poets were by this time read by every person of condition, and considered as the standards for polite composition. But, as national prejudices were still strong, the busy, the learned, the gay, and the fair, continued to speak

speak their native dialect, and that with an elegance and poignancy, of which Scotsmen of the present day can have no just notion. I am old enough to have conversed with Mr. Spittal, of Leuchat, a scholar and a man of fashion, who survived all the members of the Union Parliament, in which he had a seat. His pronunciation and phraseology differed as much from the common dialect, as the language of St. James's from that of Thames-street. Had we retained a court and parliament of our own, the tongues of the two sister kingdoms would indeed have differed like the Castilian and Portuguese; but each would have had its own classics, not in a single branch, but in the whole circle of literature.

"Ramsay associated with the men of wit and fashion of his day, and several of them attempted to write poetry in his manner. Persons too idle or too dissipated to think of compositions that required much exertion, succeeded very happily in making tender sonnets to favourite tunes in compliment to their mistresses, and, transforming themselves into impassioned shepherds, caught the language of the characters they assumed. Thus, about the year 1731, Robert Crawfurd of Auchinames, wrote the modern song of *Tweed Side*,* which has been so much

* Beginning, *What beauties does Flora disclose!*

much admired. In 1743, Sir Gilbert Elliot, the first of our lawyers who both spoke and wrote English elegantly, composed in the character of a love-sick swain, a beautiful song, beginning, *My sheep I neglected, I lost my sheep-hook*, on the marriage of his mistress, Miss Forbes, with Ronald Crawfurd. And about twelve years afterwards, the sister of Sir Gilbert wrote the *ancient* words to the tune of the *Flowers of the Forest*,* and supposed to allude to the battle of Flowden. In spite of the double rhyme, it is a sweet, and though in some parts allegorical, a natural expression of national sorrow. The more *modern* words to the same tune, beginning, *I have seen the smiling of fortune beguiling*, were written long before by Mrs. Cockburn, a woman of great wit, who outlived all the first group of *literati* of the present century, all of whom were very fond of her. I was delighted with her company, though, when I saw her, she was very old. Much did she know that is now lost."

In addition to these instances of Scottish songs produced in the earlier part of the present century, may be mentioned the ballad of *Hardiknute*, by Lady Wardlaw; the ballad of *William and Margaret;* and the song entitled the *Birks*

* Beginning, *I have heard a lilting at our ewes-milking.*

Birks of Endermay, by Mallet; the love-song, beginning, *For ever, Fortune, wilt thou prove*, produced by the youthful muse of Thomson; and the exquisite pathetic ballad, *the Braes of Yarrow*, by Hamilton of Bangour. On the revival of letters in Scotland, subsequent to the Union, a very general taste seems to have prevailed for the national songs and music. "For many years," says Mr. Ramsay, "the singing of songs was the great delight of the higher and middle order of the people, as well as of the peasantry; and though a taste for Italian music has interfered with this amusement, it is still very prevalent. Between forty and fifty years ago, the common people were not only exceedingly fond of songs and ballads, but of metrical history. Often have I, in my cheerful morn of youth, listened to them with delight, when reading or reciting the exploits of Wallace and Bruce against the *Southrons*. Lord Hailes was wont to call Blind Harry their *bible*, he being their great favourite next the Scriptures. When therefore, one in the vale of life, felt the first emotions of genius, he wanted not models *sui generis*. But though the seeds of poetry were scattered with a plentiful hand among the Scottish peasantry, the product was probably like that of pears and apples—of a thousand that spring up, nine hundred and fifty are so bad as to set the teeth on edge; forty-five

or

or more are passable and useful; and the rest of an exquisite flavour. Allan Ramsay and Burns are *wildlings* of this last description. They had the example of the elder Scottish poets; they were not without the aid of the best English writers; and, what was of still more importance, they were no strangers to the book of nature, and to the book of God."

From this general view, it is apparent that Allan Ramsay may be considered as in a great measure the reviver of the rural poetry of his country. His collection of ancient Scottish poems, under the name of *The Ever-Green*, his collection of Scottish songs, and his own poems, the principal of which is the *Gentle Shepherd*, have been universally read among the peasantry of his country, and have in some degree superseded the adventures of Bruce and Wallace, as recorded by Barbour and Blind Harry. Burns was well acquainted with all these. He had also before him the poems of Fergusson in the Scottish dialect, which have been produced in our own times, and of which it will be necessary to give a short account.

Fergusson was born of parents who had it in their power to procure him a liberal education, a circumstance, however, which in Scotland implies no very high rank in society. From a well

well written and apparently authentic account of his life,* we learn that he spent six years at the schools of Edinburgh and Dundee, and several years at the universities of Edinburgh and St. Andrew's. It appears that he was at one time destined for the Scottish church; but, as he advanced towards manhood, he renounced that intention, and at Edinburgh entered the office of a writer to the signet, a title which designates a separate and higher order of Scottish attorneys. Fergusson had sensibility of mind, a warm and generous heart, and talents for society of the most attractive kind. To such a man no situation could be more dangerous than that in which he was placed. The excesses into which he was led, impaired his feeble constitution, and he sunk under them in the month of October, 1774, in his 23d or 24th year. Burns was not acquainted with the poems of this youthful genius when he himself began to write poetry; and when he first saw them, he had renounced the muses. But while he resided in the town of Irvine, meeting with *Fergusson's Scottish Poems*, he informs us that he "strung his lyre anew with emulating vigour."†

Touched

* In the Supplement to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. See also, *Campbell's Introduction to the History of Poetry in Scotland, p.* 288.

† See *p.* 51 *of this volume.*

Touched by the sympathy originating in kindred genius, and in the forebodings of similar fortune, Burns regarded Fergusson with a partial and an affectionate admiration. Over his grave he erected a monument, as has already been mentioned; and his poems he has, in several instances, made the subjects of his imitation.

From this account of the Scottish poems known to Burns, those who are acquainted with them will see that they are chiefly humorous or pathetic; and under one or other of these descriptions most of his own poems will class. Let us compare him with his predecessors under each of these points of view, and close our examination with a few general observations.

It has frequently been observed, that Scotland has produced, comparatively speaking, few writers who have excelled in humour. But this observation is true only when applied to those who have continued to reside in their own country, and have confined themselves to composition in pure English; and in these circumstances it admits of an easy explanation. The Scottish poets, who have written in the dialect of Scotland, have been at all times remarkable for dwelling on subjects of humour, in which indeed many of them have excelled. It would be easy to shew, that the dialect of Scotland having

having become provincial, is now scarcely suited to the more elevated kinds of poetry. If we may believe that the poem of *Christis Kirk of the Grene* was written by James the First of Scotland,* this accomplished monarch, who had received an English education under the direction of Henry the Fourth, and who bore arms under his gallant successor, gave the model on which the greater part of the humorous productions of the rustic muse of Scotland has been formed. *Christis Kirk of the Grene* was reprinted by Ramsay somewhat modernized in the orthography, and two cantos were added by him, in which he attempts to carry on the design. Hence the poem of King James is usually printed in Ramsay's works. The royal bard describes, in the first canto, a rustic dance, and afterwards a contention in archery, ending in an affray. Ramsay relates the restoration of concord, and the renewal of the rural sports, with the humours of a country wedding. Though each of the poets describes the manners

* Notwithstanding the evidence produced on this subject by Mr. Tytler, the Editor acknowledges his being somewhat of a sceptic on this point. Sir David Dalrymple inclines to the opinion that it was written by his successor, James the Fifth. There are difficulties attending this supposition also. But on the subject of Scottish Antiquities the Editor is an incompetent judge.

ners of his respective age, yet in the whole piece there is a very sufficient uniformity; a striking proof of the identity of character in the Scottish peasantry at the two periods, distant from each other three hundred years. It is an honourable distinction to this body of men, that their character and manners, very little embellished, have been found to be susceptible of an amusing and interesting species of poetry; and it must appear not a little curious, that the single nation of modern Europe which possesses an original rural poetry, should have received the model, followed by their rustic bards, from the monarch on the throne.

The two additional cantos to *Christis Kirk of the Grene*, written by Ramsay, though objectionable in point of delicacy, are among the happiest of his productions. His chief excellence indeed, lay in the description of rural characters, incidents and scenery; for he did not possess any very high powers either of imagination or of understanding. He was well acquainted with the peasantry of Scotland, their lives and opinions. The subject was in a great measure new; his talents were equal to the subject; and he has shewn that it may be happily adapted to pastoral poetry. In his *Gentle Shepherd*, the characters are delineations from nature, the descriptive parts are in the genuine

style of beautiful simplicity, the passions and affections of rural life are finely portrayed, and the heart is pleasingly interested in the happiness that is bestowed on innocence and virtue. Throughout the whole there is an air of reality which the most careless reader cannot but perceive; and in fact no poem ever perhaps acquired so high a reputation, in which truth received so little embellishment from the imagination. In his pastoral songs, and in his rural tales, Ramsay appears to less advantage indeed, but still with considerable attraction. The story of the *Monk and the Miller's Wife*, though somewhat licentious, may rank with the happiest productions of Prior or La Fontaine. But when he attempts subjects from higher life, and aims at pure English composition, he is feeble and uninteresting, and seldom even reaches mediocrity.* Neither are his familiar epistles and elegies in the Scottish dialect entitled to much approbation. Though Fergusson had higher powers of imagination than Ramsay, his genius was not of the highest order; nor did his learning, which was considerable, improve his genius. His poems written in pure English in which he often follows classical models, though superior to the English poems of Ramsay, seldom rise above mediocrity; but in those composed

* See *The Morning Interview*, &c.

composed in the Scottish dialect he is often very successful. He was in general, however, less happy than Ramsay in the subjects of his muse. As he spent the greater part of his life in Edinburgh, and wrote for his amusement in the intervals of business or dissipation, his Scottish poems are chiefly founded on the incidents of a town life, which, though they are susceptible of humour, do not admit of those delineations of scenery and manners, which vivify the rural poetry of Ramsay, and which so agreeably amuse the fancy and interest the heart. The town-eclogues of Fergusson, if we may so denominate them, are however faithful to nature, and often distinguished by a very happy vein of humour. His poems entitled *The Daft Days*, *The King's Birth-day in Edinburgh*, *Leith Races*, and *The Hallow Fair*, will justify this character. In these, particularly in the last, he imitated *Christis Kirk of the Grene*, as Ramsay had done before him. His *Address to the Tron-kirk Bell* is an exquisite piece of humour, which Burns has scarcely excelled. In appreciating the genius of Fergusson, it ought to be recollected, that his poems are the careless effusions of an irregular though amiable young man, who wrote for the periodical papers of the day, and who died in early youth. Had his life been prolonged under happier circumstances of fortune, he would probably have risen to much

higher reputation. He might have excelled in rural poetry; for though his professed pastorals on the established Sicilian model, are stale and uninteresting, *The Farmer's Ingle*,* which may be considered as a Scottish pastoral, is the happiest of all his productions, and certainly was the archetype of the *Cotter's Saturday Night.* Fergusson, and more especially Burns, have shewn that the character and manners of the peasantry of Scotland, of the present times, are as well adapted to poetry, as in the day of Ramsay, or of the author of *Christis Kirk of the Grene.*

The humour of Burns is of a richer vein than that of Ramsay or Fergusson, both of whom, as he himself informs us, he had "frequently in his eye, but rather with a view to kindle at their flame, than to servile imitation."† His descriptive powers, whether the objects on which they are employed be comic or serious, animate or inanimate, are of the highest order. A superiority of this kind is essential to every species of poetical excellence. In one of his earlier poems, his plan seems to be to inculcate a lesson of contentment on the lower classes of society, by shewing that their superiors are neither

* The farmer's fire-side.

† *Vol.* iii. *Appendix, p.* 389.

neither much better nor happier than themselves; and this he chooses to execute in the form of a dialogue between two dogs. He introduces this dialogue by an account of the persons and characters of the speakers. The first, whom he has named *Cæsar*, is a dog of condition:

> " His locked, letter'd, braw brass-collar,
> Shew'd him the gentleman and scholar."

High-bred though he is, he is however full of condescension:

> " At kirk or market, mill or smiddie,
> Nae tawted tyke, tho' e'er sae duddie,
> But he wad stan't, as glad to see him,
> *And stroan't on stanes an' hillocks wi' him.*"

The other, *Luath*, is a " ploughman's collie," but a cur of a good heart and a sound understanding.

> " His honest, sonsie, bawsn't face,
> Ay gat him friends in ilka place;
> His breast was white, his towsie back
> Weel clad wi' coat o' glossy black;
> *His gawcie tail, wi' upward curl,*
> *Hung o'er his hurdies wi' a swirl.*"

Never were *twa dogs* so exquisitely delineated. Their gambols before they sit down to moralize,

moralize, are described with an equal degree of happiness; and through the whole dialogue, the character, as well as the different condition of the two speakers, is kept in view. The speech of *Luath*, in which he enumerates the comforts of the poor, gives the following account of their merriment on the first day of the year:

> "That merry day the year begins,
> They bar the door on frosty winds;
> The nappy reeks wi' mantling ream,
> And sheds a heart-inspiring steam;
> The luntin pipe, and sneeshin' mill,
> Are handed round wi' right guid-will;
> The canty auld folks crackin crouse,
> The young anes rantin thro' the house—
> My heart has been sae fain to see them,
> *That I for joy hae barkit wi' them.*"

Of all the animals who have moralized on human affairs since the days of Æsop, the dog seems best entitled to this privilege, as well from his superior sagacity, as from his being more than any other, the friend and associate of man. The dogs of Burns, excepting in their talent for moralizing, are downright dogs; and not like the horses of Swift, or the *Hind and Panther* of Dryden, men in the shape of brutes. It is this circumstance that heightens the humour of the dialogue. The "twa dogs" are constantly

constantly kept before our eyes, and the contrast between their form and character as dogs, and the sagacity of their conversation, heightens the humour, and deepens the impression of the poet's satire. Though in this poem the chief excellence may be considered as humour, yet great talents are displayed in its composition; the happiest powers of description and the deepest insight into the human heart.* It is seldom, however, that the humour of Burns appears in so simple a form. The liveliness of his sensibility frequently impels him to introduce into subjects of humour, emotions of tenderness or of pity: and, where occasion admits, he is sometimes carried on to exert the higher powers of imagination. In such instances

* When this poem first appeared, it was thought by some very surprising, that a peasant who had not an opportunity of associating even with a simple gentleman, should have been able to portray the character of high-life with such accuracy. And when it was recollected that he had probably been at the races of Ayr, where nobility as well as gentry are to be seen, it was concluded that the race-ground had been the field of his observation. This was sagacious enough; but it did not require such instruction to inform Burns, that human nature is essentially the same in the high and the low; and a genius which comprehends the human mind, easily comprehends the accidental varieties introduced by situation.

stances he leaves the society of Ramsay and of Fergusson, and associates himself with the masters of English poetry, whose language he frequently assumes.

Of the union of tenderness and humour, examples may be found in *The Death and Dying Words of poor Mailie*, in *The auld Farmer's New-Year's Morning Salutation to his Mare Maggie*, and in many of his other poems. The praise of whiskey is a favourite subject with Burns. To this he dedicates his poem of *Scotch Drink*.* After mentioning its cheering influence in a variety of situations, he describes, with singular liveliness and power of fancy, its stimulating effects on the blacksmith working at his forge:

> " Nae mercy, then, for airn and steel;
> The brawnie, bainie, ploughman chiel,
> Brings hard owre-hip, wi' sturdy wheel,
> The strong fore-hammer,
> Till block an' studdie ring and reel
> Wi' dinsome clamour."

On another occasion,† choosing to exalt whiskey above wine, he introduces a comparison

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* *Vol.* iii. *p.* 12.

† The *Author's earnest cry and prayer to the Scotch Representatives in Parliament, vol.* iii. *p.* 19.

son between the natives of more genial climes, to whom the vine furnishes their beverage, and his own countrymen who drink the spirit of malt. The description of the Scotsman is humorous:

" But bring a Scotsman frae his hill,
Clap in his cheek a Highland gill,*
Say, such is royal George's will,
An' there's the foe,
He has nae thought but how to kill
Twa at a blow."

Here the notion of danger rouses the imagination of the poet. He goes on thus:

" Nae cauld, faint-hearted doubtings teaze him;
Death comes—wi' fearless eye he sees him:
Wi' bluidy hand a welcome gies him,
An' when he fa's,
His latest draught o' breathing lea'es him
In faint huzzas."

Again, however, he sinks into humour, and concludes the poem with the following most laughable, but most irreverent apostrophe:

" Scotland, my auld, respected mither!
Tho' whyles ye moistify your leather,
Till whare ye sit, on craps o' heather,
Ye tine your dam:
Freedom and *whiskey* gang thegither,
Tak aff your dram!"

Of

* Of whiskey.

Of this union of humour with the higher powers of imagination, instances may be found in the poem entitled *Death and Dr. Hornbook*, and in almost every stanza of the *Address to the Deil*, one of the happiest of his productions. After reproaching this terrible being with all his "doings" and misdeeds, in the course of which he passes through a series of Scottish superstitions, and rises at times into a high strain of poetry; he concludes this address, delivered in a tone of great familiarity, not altogether unmixed with apprehension, in the following words:

"But, fare ye weel, auld Nickie-ben!
O wad you tak a thought an' men'!
Ye aiblins might—I dinna ken—
Still hae a stake—
I'm wae to think upo' yon den
Ev'n for your sake!"

Humour and tenderness are here so happily intermixed, that it is impossible to say which preponderates.

Fergusson wrote a dialogue between the *Causeway* and the *Plainstones** of Edinburgh. This probably suggested to Burns his dialogue between the Old and the New bridge over the river

* The *middle of the street*, and the *side-way*.

river Ayr.* The nature of such subjects requires that they shall be treated humorously, and Fergusson has attempted nothing beyond this. Though the *Causeway* and the *Plainstones* talk together, no attempt is made to personify the speakers. A "cadie"† heard the conversation, and reported it to the poet.

In the dialogue between the *Brigs of Ayr*, Burns himself is the auditor, and the time and occasion on which it occurred is related with great circumstantiality. The poet, "pressed by care," or "inspired by whim," had left his bed in the town of Ayr, and wandered out alone in the darkness and solitude of a winter-night, to the mouth of the river, where the stillness was interrupted only by the rushing sound of the influx of the tide. It was after midnight. The Dungeon-clock ‡ had struck two, and the sound had been repeated by Wallace-Tower.‡ All else was hushed. The moon shone brightly, and

> "The chilly frost, beneath the silver beam,
> Crept gently-crusting, o'er the glittering stream."

In this situation the listening bard hears the "clanging

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* *The Brigs of Ayr, vol.* iii. *p.* 50.

† A messenger. ‡ The two steeples of Ayr.

"clanging sugh" of wings moving through the air, and speedily he perceives two beings, reared, the one on the Old, the other on the New Bridge, whose form and attire he describes, and whose conversation with each other he rehearses. These genii enter into a comparison of the respective edifices over which they preside, and afterwards, as is usual between the old and young, compare modern characters and manners with those of past times. They differ, as may be expected, and taunt and scold each other in broad Scotch. This conversation, which is certainly humorous, may be considered as the proper business of the poem. As the debate runs high, and threatens serious consequences, all at once it is interrupted by a new scene of wonders:

——————— "all before their sight
A fairy train appear'd in order bright;
Adown the glittering stream they featly danc'd;
Bright to the moon their various dresses glanc'd;
They footed o'er the wat'ry glass so neat,
The infant ice scarce bent beneath their feet;
While arts of Minstrelsy among them rung,
And soul-ennobling Bards heroic ditties sung."

* * * * * *

—"The Genius of the Stream in front appears,
A venerable chief, advanc'd in years;

His

His hoary head with water-lilies crown'd,
His manly leg with garter-tangle bound."

Next follow a number of other allegorical beings, among whom are the four seasons, Rural Joy, Plenty, Hospitality, and Courage.

"Benevolence, with mild benignant air,
A female form, came from the tow'rs of Stair:
Learning and wealth in equal measures trode,
From simple Catrine, their long-lov'd abode:
Last, white-rob'd Peace, crown'd with a hazel-wreath,
To rustic Agriculture did bequeath
The broken iron instruments of Death;
At sight of whom our Sprites forgat their kindling wrath."

This poem, irregular and imperfect as it is, displays various and powerful talents, and may serve to illustrate the genius of Burns. In particular, it affords a striking instance of his being carried beyond his original purpose by the powers of imagination.

In Fergusson's poem, the *Plainstones* and *Causeway* contrast the characters of the different persons who walked upon them. Burns probably conceived, that, by a dialogue between the Old and New Bridge, he might form a humorous contrast between ancient and modern manners in the town of Ayr. Such a dialogue could

could only be supposed to pass in the stillness of night; and this led our poet into a description of a midnight scene, which excited in a high degree the powers of his imagination. During the whole dialogue the scenery is present to his fancy, and at length it suggests to him a fairy dance of aërial beings, under the beams of the moon, by which the wrath of the Genii of the *Brigs of Ayr* is appeased.

Incongruous as the different parts of this poem are, it is not an incongruity that displeases; and we have only to regret that the poet did not bestow a little pains in making the figures more correct, and in smoothing the versification.

The epistles of Burns, in which may be included his *Dedication to G. H. Esq.*, discover, like his other writings, the powers of a superior understanding. They display deep insight into human nature, a gay and happy strain of reflection, great independence of sentiment, and generosity of heart. It is to be regretted, that in his *Holy Fair*, and in some of his other poems, his humour degenerates into personal satire, and that it is not sufficiently guarded in other respects. The *Halloween* of Burns is free from every objection of this sort. It is interesting, not merely from its humorous description

tion of manners, but as it records the spells and charms used on the celebration of a festival, now, even in Scotland, falling into neglect, but which was once observed over the greater part of Britain and Ireland.* These charms are supposed to afford an insight into futurity, especially on the subject of marriage, the most interesting event of rural life. In the *Halloween*, a female, in performing one of the spells, has occasion to go out by moonlight to dip her shift-sleeve into a stream *running towards the South.*† It was not necessary for Burns to give a description of this stream. But it was the character of his ardent mind to pour forth not merely what the occasion required, but what is admitted; and the temptation to describe so beautiful a natural object by moonlight, was not to be resisted—

" Whyles owre a linn the burnie plays
As thro' the glen it wimpl't;
Whyles round a rocky scar it strays;
Whyles in a wiel it dimpl't;
Whyles glitter'd to the nightly rays,
Wi' bickering dancing dazzle;
Whyles cookit underneath the braes,
Beneath the spreading hazel,
Unseen that night.

Those

* In Ireland it is still celebrated. It is not quite in disuse in Wales.

† See *vol.* iii. *p.* 136. 137.

Those who understand the Scottish dialect will allow this to be one of the finest instances of description which the records of poetry afford. Though of a very different nature, it may be compared in point of excellence with Thomson's description of a river swollen by the rains of winter, bursting through the streights that confine its torrent, "boiling, wheeling, foaming, and thundering along."*

In pastoral, or, to speak more correctly, in rural poetry of a serious nature, Burns excelled equally as in that of a humorous kind, and, using less of the Scottish dialect in his serious poems, he becomes more generally intelligible. It is difficult to decide whether *the Address to a Mouse whose nest was turned up with the plough*,† should be considered as serious or comic. Be this as it may, the poem is one of the happiest and most finished of his productions. If we smile at the "bickering brattle" of this little flying animal, it is a smile of tenderness and pity. The descriptive part is admirable; the moral reflections beautiful, and arising directly out of the occasion; and in the conclusion there is a deep melancholy, a sentiment of doubt and dread, that rises to the sublime. The *Address to a Mountain Daisy, turned down with the*

* See Thomson's *Winter*. † *Vol.* iii. 146.

the plough,* is a poem of the same nature, though somewhat inferior in point of originality, as well as in the interest produced. To extract out of incidents so common, and seemingly so trivial as these, so fine a train of sentiment and imagery, is the surest proof, as well as the most brilliant triumph, of original genius. *The vision*, in two cantos, from which a beautiful extract is taken by Mr. Mackenzie, in the 97th number of the *Lounger*, is a poem of great and various excellence. The opening, in which the poet describes his own state of mind, retiring in the evening, wearied from the labours of the day, to moralize on his conduct and prospects, is truly interesting. The chamber, if we may so term it, in which he sits down to muse, is an exquisite painting:

> " There, lanely, by the ingle-cheek,
> I sat and ey'd the spewing reek,
> That fill'd wi' hoast-provoking smeek
> That auld clay biggin;
> An' heard the restless rattons squeak
> About the riggin."

To reconcile to our imagination the entrance of an aërial being into a mansion of this kind, required the powers of Burns—he however succeeds. Coila enters, and her countenance, at-

* *Vol.* iii. *p.* 201.

titude, and dress, unlike those of other spiritual beings, are distinctly portrayed. To the painting on her mantle, on which is depicted the most striking scenery, as well as the most distinguished characters, of his native country, some exceptions may be made. The mantle of Coila, like the cup of Thyrsis,* and the shield of Achilles, is too much crowded with figures, and some of the objects represented upon it are scarcely admissible, according to the principles of design. The generous temperament of Burns led him into these exuberances. In his second edition he enlarged the number of figures originally introduced, that he might include objects to which he was attached by sentiments of affection, gratitude, or patriotism. The second *Duan*, or canto of this poem, in which Coila describes her own nature and occupations, particularly her superintendence of his infant genius, and in which she reconciles him to the character of a bard, is an elevated and solemn strain of poetry, ranking in all respects, excepting the harmony of numbers, with the higher productions of the English muse. The concluding stanza, compared with that already quoted, will show to what a height Burns rises in this poem, from the point at which he set out:—

" *And*

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* See the first *Idyllium* of Theocritus.

"*And wear thou this*—she solemn said,
And bound the *holly* round my head;
The polish'd leaves, and berries red,
Did rustling play;
And, like a passing thought, she fled
In light away."

In various poems Burns has exhibited the picture of a mind under the deep impressions of real sorrow. *The Lament*, the *Ode to Ruin*, *Despondency*, and *Winter, a Dirge*, are of this character. In the first of those poems the 8th stanza, which describes a sleepless night from anguish of mind, is particularly striking. Burns often indulged in those melancholy views of the nature and condition of man, which are so congenial to the temperament of sensibility. The poem entitled *Man was made to Mourn*, affords an instance of this kind, and *The Winter Night** is of the same description. The last is highly characteristic, both of the temper of mind, and of the condition of Burns. It begins with a description of a dreadful storm on a night in winter. The poet represents himself as lying in bed, and listening to its howling. In this situation he naturally turns his thoughts to the *ourie*†

 Cattle,

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* *See vol.* iii. *p.* 149.

† *Ourie*, out-lying. *Ourie Cattle*, Cattle that are unhoused all winter. *Ourie*—drooping, shivering.

Cattle, and the *silly** *Sheep*, exposed to all the violence of the tempest. Having lamented their fate, he proceeds in the following manner:

" Ilk happing bird—wee, helpless thing!
That, in the merry months o' spring,
Delighted me to hear thee sing,
What comes o' thee?
Whare wilt thou cow'r thy chittering wing,
An' close thy e'e?"

Other reflections of the same nature occur to his mind; and as the midnight moon "muffled with clouds" casts her dreary light on his window, thoughts of a darker and more melancholy nature crowd upon him. In this state of mind, he hears a voice pouring through the gloom a solemn and plaintive strain of reflection. The mourner compares the fury of the elements with that of man to his brother man, and finds the former light in the balance.

" See stern Oppression's iron grip,
Or mad ambition's gory hand,
Sending, like blood-hounds from the slip,
Woe, want, and murder, o'er the land."—

He pursues this train of reflection through a variety of particulars, in the course of which he introduces the following animated apostrophe:

" O

* *Silly* is in this, as in other places, a term of compassion and endearment.

" O ye! who, sunk in beds of down,
Feel not a want but what yourselves create,
Think, for a moment, on his wretched fate,
Whom friends and fortune quite disown!
Ill-satisfied keen Nature's clam'rous call,
Stretch'd on his straw he lays him down to sleep,
While thro' the ragged roof and chinky wall,
Chill o'er his slumbers piles the drifty heap."

The strain of sentiment which runs through this poem is noble, though the execution is unequal, and the versification is defective.

Among the serious poems of Burns, *The Cotter's Saturday Night* is perhaps entitled to the first rank. *The Farmer's Ingle* of Fergusson evidently suggested the plan of this poem, as has been already mentioned; but after the plan was formed, Burns trusted entirely to his own powers for the execution. Fergusson's poem is certainly very beautiful. It has all the charms which depend on rural characters and manners happily portrayed, and exhibited under circumstances highly grateful to the imagination. *The Farmer's Ingle* begins with describing the return of evening. The toils of the day are over, and the farmer retires to his comfortable fire-side. The reception which he and his men-servants receive from the careful housewife, is pleasingly described. After their supper is over, they begin to talk on the rural events of the day.

" 'Bout

" 'Bout kirk and market eke their tales gae on,
How *Jock* woo'd *Jenny* here to be his bride;
And there how *Marion* for a bastart son,
Upo' the cutty-stool was forced to ride,
The waefu' scauld o' our *Mess John* to bide."

The " Guidame" is next introduced as forming a circle round the fire, in the midst of her grand-children, and while she spins from the rock, and the spindle plays on her " russet lap," she is relating to the young ones tales of witches and ghosts. The poet exclaims,

" O mock na this my friends! but rather mourn,
Ye in life's brawest spring wi' reason clear,
Wi' eild our idle fancies a' return,
And dim our dolefu' days wi' bairnly fear;
The mind's aye *cradled* when the *grave* is near."

In the mean time the farmer, wearied with the fatigues of the day, stretches himself at length on the *settle*, a sort of rustic couch, which extends on one side of the fire, and the cat and house-dog leap upon it to receive his caresses. Here, resting at his ease, he gives his directions to his men-servants for the succeeding day. The house-wife follows his example, and gives her orders to the maidens. By degrees the oil in the cruise begins to fail; the fire runs low; sleep steals on this rustic group; and they move off to enjoy their peaceful slumbers. The poet concludes

cludes by bestowing his blessing on the " husbandman and all his tribe."

This is an original and truly interesting pastoral. It possesses every thing required in this species of composition. We might have perhaps said, every thing that it admits, had not Burns written his *Cotter's Saturday Night.*

The cottager returning from his labours, has no servants to accompany him, to partake of his fare, or to receive his instructions. The circle which he joins, is composed of his wife and children only; and if it admits of less variety, it affords an opportunity for representing scenes that more strongly interest the affections. The younger children running to meet him, and clambering round his knee; the elder, returning from their weekly labours with the neighbouring farmers, dutifully depositing their little gains with their parents, and receiving their father's blessing and instructions; the incidents of the courtship of Jenny, their eldest daughter, " woman grown;" are circumstances of the most interesting kind, which are most happily delineated: and after their frugal supper, the representation of these humble cottagers forming a wider circle round their hearth, and uniting in the worship of God, is a picture the most deeply affecting of any which the rural muse has ever presented

presented to the view. Burns was admirably adapted to this delineation. Like all men of genius he was of the temperament of devotion, and the powers of memory co-operated in this instance with the sensibility of his heart, and the fervour of his imagination.* *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, is tender and moral, it is solemn and devotional, and rises at length into a strain of grandeur and sublimity, which modern poetry has not surpassed. The noble sentiments of patriotism with which it concludes, correspond with the rest of the poem. In no age or country have the pastoral muses breathed such elevated accents, if the Messiah of Pope be excepted, which is indeed a pastoral in form only. It is to be regretted that Burns did not employ his genius on other subjects of the same nature, which the manners and customs of the Scottish peasantry would have amply supplied. Such poetry is not to be estimated by the degree of pleasure which it bestows; it sinks deeply into the heart, and is calculated, far beyond any other human means, for giving permanence to the scenes and the characters it so exquisitely describes.†

Before

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* The reader will recollect that the Cotter was Burns's father. *See p.* 83.

† See Appendix, *No.* II. *Note D.*

Before we conclude, it will be proper to offer a few observations on the lyric productions of Burns. His compositions of this kind are chiefly songs, generally in the Scottish dialect, and always after the model of the Scottish songs, on the general character and moral influence of which, some observations have already been offered.* We may hazard a few more particular remarks.

Of the historic or heroic ballads of Scotland, it is unnecessary to speak. Burns has no where imitated them, a circumstance to be regretted, since in this species of composition, from its admitting the more terrible as well as the softer graces of poetry, he was eminently qualified to have excelled. The Scottish songs which served as a model to Burns, are almost without exception pastoral, or rather rural. Such of them as are comic, frequently treat of a rustic courtship, or a country wedding; or they describe the differences of opinion which arise in married life. Burns has imitated this species, and surpassed his models. The song beginning, "Husband, husband, cease your strife,"† may be cited in support of this observation.‡ His other comic songs

* See *p.* 15, 16, 17. † See *vol.* iv. *p.* 145.

‡ The dialogues between husbands and their wives, which

songs are of equal merit. In the rural songs of Scotland, whether humorous or tender, the sentiments are given to particular characters, and very generally, the incidents are referred to particular scenery. This last circumstance may be considered as the distinguishing feature of the Scottish songs, and on it a considerable part of their attraction depends. On all occasions the sentiments, of whatever nature, are delivered in the character of the person principally interested. If love be described, it is not as it is observed, but as it is felt; and the passion is delineated under a particular aspect. Neither is it the fiercer impulses of desire that are expressed, as in the celebrated ode of Sappho, the model of so many modern songs; but those gentler emotions of tenderness and affection, which do not entirely absorb the lover; but permit him to associate his emotions with the charms of external nature, and breathe the accents of purity and innocence, as well as of love. In these respects the love-songs of Scotland are honourably distinguished

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which form the subjects of the Scottish songs, are almost all ludicrous and satirical, and in these contests the lady is generally victorious. From the collections of Mr. Pinkerton we find that the comic muse of Scotland delighted in such representations from very early times, in her rude dramatic efforts, as well as in her rustic songs.

guished from the most admired classical compositions of the same kind; and by such associations, a variety, as well as liveliness, is given to the representation of this passion, which are not to be found in the poetry of Greece or Rome, or perhaps of any other nation. Many of the love-songs of Scotland describe scenes of rural courtship; many may be considered as invocations from lovers to their mistresses. On such occasions a degree of interest and reality is given to the sentiments, by the spot destined to these happy interviews being particularized. The lovers perhaps meet at the *Bush aboon Traquair*, or on the *Banks of Ettrick;* the nymphs are invoked to wander among the wilds of *Roslin*, or *the woods of Invermay.* Nor is the spot merely pointed out; the scenery is often described as well as the characters, so as to present a complete picture to the fancy.* Thus the maxim of Horace, *ut pictura poesis*, is faithfully observed by

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* One or two examples may illustrate this observation. A Scottish song, written about a hundred years ago, begins thus:—

"On Ettrick banks, on a summer's night
At gloaming, when the sheep drove hame,
I met my lassie, braw and tight,
Come wading barefoot a' her lane:

My

by these rustic bards, who are guided by the same impulse of nature and sensibility which influenced the father of epic poetry, on whose example the precept of the Roman poet was perhaps founded. By this means the imagination is employed to interest the feelings. When we do not

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My heart grew light, I ran, I flang
My arms about her lily-neck,
And kiss'd and clasped there fu' lang,
My words they were na mony feck."*

The lover, who is a Highlander, goes on to relate the language he employed with his Lowland maid to win her heart, and to persuade her to fly with him to the Highland hills, there to share his fortune. The sentiments are in themselves beautiful. But we feel them with double force, while we conceive that they were addressed by a lover to his mistress, whom he met all alone, on a summer's evening, by the banks of a beautiful stream, which some of us have actually seen, and which all of us can paint to our imagination. Let us take another example. It is now a nymph that speaks. Hear how she expresses herself—

" How blythe each morn was I to see
My swain come o'er the hill!
He skipt the burn, and flew to me,
I met him with guid will."

Here

* *Mony feck*, not very many.

not conceive distinctly, we do not sympathize deeply in any human affection; and we conceive nothing in the abstract. Abstraction, so useful in morals, and so essential in science, must be abandoned when the heart is to be subdued by the powers of poetry or of eloquence. The bards of a ruder condition of society paint individual objects; and hence among other causes, the easy access they obtain to the heart. Generalization is the vice of poets whose learning overpowers their genius; of poets of a refined and scientific age.

The dramatic style which prevails so much in the Scottish songs, while it contributes greatly

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Here is another picture drawn by the pencil of Nature. We see a shepherdess standing by the side of a brook, watching her lover as he descends the opposite hill. He bounds lightly along; he approaches nearer and nearer; he leaps the brook, and flies into her arms. In the recollection of these circumstances, the surrounding scenery becomes endeared to the fair mourner, and she bursts into the following exclamation:

"O the broom, the bonnie bonnie broom,
The broom of the Cowden-Knowes!
I wish I were with my dear swain,
With his pipe and my ewes."

Thus the individual spot of this happy interview is pointed out, and the picture is completed.

greatly to the interest they excite, also shews that they have originated among a people in the earlier stages of society. Where this form of composition appears in songs of a modern date, it indicates that they have been written after the ancient model.*

The Scottish songs are of very unequal poetical merit, and this inequality often extends to the different parts of the same song. Those that are humorous, or characteristic of manners, have in general the merit of copying nature; those

* That the dramatic form of writing characterizes the productions of an early, or, what amounts to the same thing, of a rude stage of society, may be illustrated by a reference to the most ancient compositions that we know of, the Hebrew scriptures, and the writings of Homer. The form of dialogue is adopted in the old Scottish ballads even in narration, whenever the situations described become interesting. This sometimes produces a very striking effect, of which an instance may be given from the ballad of *Edom o' Gordon*, a composition apparently of the sixteenth century. The story of the ballad is shortly this—The castle of Rhodes, in the absence of its lord, is attacked by the robber Edom o' Gordon. The lady stands on her defence, beats off the assailants, and wounds Gordon, who in his rage orders the castle to be set on fire. That his orders are carried into effect, we learn from the expostulation of the lady, who

those that are serious, are tender, and often sweetly interesting, but seldom exhibit high powers of imagination, which indeed do not easily find a place in this species of composition. The alliance of the words of the Scottish songs with the music, has in some instances given to the former a popularity, which otherwise they would not have obtained.

The association of the words and the music of these songs, with the more beautiful parts of the scenery of Scotland, contributes to the same effect.

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who is represented as standing on the battlements, and remonstrating on this barbarity. She is interrupted—

" O then bespake her little son,
Sate on his nourice' knee;
Says, ' mither dear, gi' owre this house,
' For the reek it smithers me.'
" I wad gie a' my gowd, my childe,
" Sae wad I a' my fee,
" For ae blast o' the westlin wind,
" To blaw the reek frae thee."

The circumstantiality of the Scottish love-songs, and the dramatic form which prevails so generally in them, probably arises from their being the descendants and successors of the ancient ballads. In the beautiful modern song of *Mary of Castle-Cary*, the dramatic form has a very happy effect. The same may be said of *Donald and Flora*, and *Come under my plaidie*, by the same author, Mr. Macniel.

effect. It has given them not merely popularity, but permanence; it has imparted to the works of man some portion of the durability of the works of nature. If, from our imperfect experience of the past, we may judge with any confidence respecting the future, songs of this description are of all others least likely to die. In the changes of language they may no doubt suffer change; but the associated strain of sentiment and of music will perhaps survive, while the clear stream sweeps down the vale of Yarrow, or the yellow broom waves on the Cowden-Knowes.

The first attempts of Burns in song-writing were not very successful. His habitual inattention to the exactness of rhymes, and to the harmony of numbers, arising probably from the models on which his versification was formed, were faults likely to appear to more disadvantage in this species of composition, than in any other; and we may also remark, that the strength of his imagination, and the exuberance of his sensibility, were with difficulty restrained within the limits of gentleness, delicacy, and tenderness, which seem to be assigned to the love-songs of his nation. Burns was better adapted by nature for following, in such compositions, the model of the Grecian than of the Scottish muse. By study and practice he however surmounted all these obstacles. In his earlier songs, there is some ruggedness;

ruggedness; but this gradually disappears in his successive efforts; and some of his latter compositions of this kind may be compared, in polished delicacy, with the finest songs in our language, while in the eloquence of sensibility they surpass them all.

The songs of Burns, like the models he followed and excelled, are often dramatic, and for the greater part amatory; and the beauties of rural nature are every where associated with the passions and emotions of the mind. Disdaining to copy the works of others, he has not, like some poets of great name, admitted into his descriptions exotic imagery. The landscapes he has painted, and the objects with which they are embellished, are, in every single instance, such as are to be found in his own country. In a mountainous region, especially when it is comparatively rude and naked, the most beautiful scenery will always be found in the valleys, and on the banks of the wooded streams. Such scenery is peculiarly interesting at the close of a summer-day. As we advance northwards, the number of the days of summer, indeed, diminishes; but from this cause, as well as from the mildness of the temperature, the attraction of the season increases, and the summer-night becomes still more beautiful. The greater obliquity of the sun's path on the ecliptic, prolongs

the grateful season of twilight to the midnight hours, and the shades of the evening seem to mingle with the morning's dawn. The rural poets of Scotland, as may be expected, associate in their songs the expressions of passion, with the most beautiful of their scenery, in the fairest season of the year, and generally in those hours of the evening when the beauties of nature are most interesting.*

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* A lady, of whose genius the editor entertains high admiration, (Mrs. Barbauld), has fallen into an error in this respect. In her prefatory address to the works of Collins, speaking of the natural objects that may be employed to give interest to the descriptions of passion, she observes, "they present an inexhaustible variety, from the Song of Solomon, breathing of cassia, myrrh, and cinnamon, to the Gentle Shepherd of Ramsay, whose damsels carry their milking pails through the frosts and snows of their less genial, but not less pastoral country." The damsels of Ramsay do not walk in the midst of frost and snow.—Almost all the scenes of the Gentle Shepherd are laid in the open air, amidst beautiful natural objects, and at the most genial season of the year. Ramsay introduces all his acts with a prefatory description to assure us of this. The fault of the climate of Britain is not, that it does not afford us the beauties of summer, but that the season of such beauties is comparatively short, and even uncertain. There are days and nights, even in the northern division of the island, which equal, or, perhaps, surpass, what

To all these adventitious circumstances, on which so much of the effect of poetry depends, great attention is paid by Burns. There is scarcely a single song of his in which particular scenery is not described, or allusions made to natural objects, remarkable for beauty or interest; and though his descriptions are not so full as are sometimes met with in the older Scottish songs, they are in the highest degree appropriate and interesting. Instances in proof of this might be quoted from *the Lea Rig*,* *Highland Mary*,† *the Soldier's Return*,‡ *Logan Water*;§ from that beautiful pastoral, *Bonnie Jean*,‖ and a great number of others. Occasionally the force of his genius carries him beyond the usual boundaries of Scottish song, and the natural objects introduced have more

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what are to be found in the latitude of Sicily or of Greece. Buchanan, when he wrote his exquisite Ode to May, felt the charm as well as the transientness of these happy days:

Salve fugacis gloria seculi,
Salve secunda digna dies nota,
Salve vetustæ vitæ imago,
Et specimen venientis Ævi!

* *Vol.* iv. *p.* 8.
† Ibid. *p.* 17.
‡ Ibid. *p.* 51.
§ *Vol.* iv. *p.* 73.
‖ Ibid. *p.* 79.

of the character of sublimity. An instance of this kind is noticed by Mr. Syme,* and many others might be adduced:

" Had I a cave on some wild, distant shore,
Where the winds howl to the wave's dashing roar;
There would I weep my woes,
There seek my lost repose,
Till grief my eyes should close,
Ne'er to wake more."†

In one song, the scene of which is laid in a winter night, the " wan moon" is described as " setting behind the white waves;"‡ in another, the " storms" are apostrophized, and commanded to " rest in the cave of their slumbers."§ On several occasions, the genius of Burns loses sight entirely of his archetypes, and rises into a strain of uniform sublimity. Instances of this kind appear in *Libertie, a Vision*,‖ and in his two war-songs, *Bruce to his Troops*,** and the *Song of Death*.†† These last are of a description of which we have no other in our language. The martial songs of our nation

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* See *p.* 210 of this volume.

† *Vol.* iv. *p.* 92.

‡ Ibid. *p.* 45.

§ *Vol.* iv. *p.* 50.

‖ Ibid. *p.* 344.

** *Vol.* iv. *p.* 125.

†† See *p.* 216 of this volume.

nation are not military, but naval. If we were to seek a comparison of these songs of Burns with others of a similar nature, we must have recourse to the poetry of ancient Greece, or of modern Gaul.

Burns has made an important addition to the songs of Scotland. In his compositions, the poetry equals and sometimes surpasses the music. He has enlarged the poetical scenery of his country. Many of her rivers and mountains, formerly unknown to the muse, are now consecrated by his immortal verse. The Doon, the Lugar, the Ayr, the Nith, and the Cluden, will in future, like the Yarrow, the Tweed, and the Tay, be considered as classic streams, and their borders will be trod with new and superior emotions.

The greater part of the songs of Burns were written after he removed into the county of Dumfries. Influenced, perhaps, by habits formed in early life, he usually composed while walking in the open air. When engaged in writing these songs, his favourite walks were on the banks of the Nith, or of the Cluden, particularly near the ruins of Lincluden Abbey; and this beautiful scenery he has very happily described under various aspects, as it appears during the softness and serenity of evening, and

and during the stillness and solemnity of the moon-light night.*

There is no species of poetry, the productions of the drama not excepted, so much calculated to influence the morals, as well as the happiness of a people, as those popular verses which are associated with national airs, and which being learnt in the years of infancy, make a deep impression on the heart before the evolution of the powers of the understanding. The compositions of Burns, of this kind, now presented in a collected form to the world, make a most important addition to the popular songs of his nation. Like all his other writings, they exhibit independence of sentiment; they are peculiarly calculated to increase those ties which bind generous hearts to their native soil, and to the domestic circle of their infancy; and to cherish those sensibilities which, under due restriction, form the purest happiness of our nature. If in his unguarded moments he composed some songs on which this praise cannot be bestowed, let us hope that they will speedily be forgotten. In several instances, where Scottish airs were allied to words objectionable in point of delicacy, Burns has substituted others of a purer character. On such occasions,

* See *vol.* iv. *p.* 160. *p.* 346.

casions, without changing the subject, he has changed the sentiments. A proof of this may be seen in the air of *John Anderson my Joe*, which is now united to words that breathe a strain of conjugal tenderness, that is as highly moral as it is exquisitely affecting.

Few circumstances could afford a more striking proof of the strength of Burns's genius, than the general circulation of his poems in England, notwithstanding the dialect in which the greater part are written, and which might be supposed to render them here uncouth or obscure. In some instances he has used this dialect on subjects of a sublime nature; but in general he confines it to sentiments or description of a tender or humorous kind; and, where he rises into elevation of thought, he assumes a purer English style. The singular faculty he possessed of mingling in the same poem humorous sentiments and descriptions, with imagery of a sublime and terrific nature, enabled him to use this variety of dialect on some occasions with striking effect. His poem of *Tam o' Shanter* affords an instance of this. There he passes from a scene of the lowest humour, to situations of the most awful and terrible kind. He is a musician that runs from the lowest to the highest of his keys; and the use of the Scottish dialect enables

ables him to add two additional notes to the bottom of his scale.

Great efforts have been made by the inhabitants of Scotland, of the superior ranks, to approximate in their speech to the pure English standard; and this has made it difficult to write in the Scottish dialect, without exciting in them some feelings of disgust, which in England are scarcely felt. An Englishman who understands the meaning of the Scottish words, is not offended, nay, on certain subjects, he is, perhaps, pleased with the rustic dialect, as he may be with the Doric Greek of Theocritus.

But a Scotchman inhabiting his own country, if a man of education, and more especially if a literary character, has banished such words from his writings, and has attempted to banish them from his speech; and being accustomed to hear them from the vulgar daily, does not easily admit of their use in poetry, which requires a style elevated and ornamental. A dislike of this kind is, however accidental, not natural. It is of the species of disgust which we feel at seeing a female of high birth in the dress of a rustic; which, if she be really young and beautiful, a little habit will enable us to overcome. A lady who assumes such a dress puts

puts her beauty, indeed, to a severer trial. She rejects—she, indeed, opposes the influence of fashion; she, possibly, abandons the grace of elegant and flowing drapery; but her native charms remain, the more striking, perhaps, because the less adorned; and to these she trusts for fixing her empire on those affections over which fashion has no sway. If she succeeds, a new association arises. The dress of the beautiful rustic becomes itself beautiful, and establishes a new fashion for the young and the gay. And when, in after ages, the contemplative observer shall view her picture in the gallery that contains the portraits of the beauties of successive centuries, each in the dress of her respective day, her drapery will not deviate, more than that of her rivals, from the standard of his taste, and he will give the palm to her who excels in the lineaments of nature.

Burns wrote professedly for the peasantry of his country, and by them their native dialect is universally relished. To a numerous class of the natives of Scotland of another description it may also be considered as attractive in a different point of view. Estranged from their native soil, and spread over foreign lands, the idiom of their country unites with the sentiments and the descriptions on which it is employed, to recal to their minds the interesting scenes

scenes of infancy and youth—to awaken many pleasing, many tender recollections. Literary men, residing at Edinburgh or Aberdeen, cannot judge on this point for one hundred and fifty thousand of their expatriated countrymen.*

To the use of the Scottish dialect in one species of poetry, the composition of songs, the taste of the public has been for some time reconciled. The dialect in question excels, as has already been observed, in the copiousness and exactness of its terms for natural objects: and in pastoral or rural songs, it gives a Doric simplicity, which is very generally approved. Neither does the regret seem well founded which

* These observations are excited by some remarks of respectable correspondents of the description alluded to. This calculation of the number of Scotchmen living out of Scotland is not altogether arbitrary, and it is probably below the truth. It is, in some degree, founded on the proportion between the number of the sexes *in Scotland*, as it appears from the invaluable Statistics of Sir John Sinclair.—For Scotchmen of this description more particularly, Burns seems to have written his song beginning, *Their groves o' sweet myrtle* (*vol.* iv. *p.* 228), a beautiful strain, which, it may be confidently predicted, will be sung with equal or superior interest, on the banks of the Ganges or of the Mississippi, as on those of the Tay or the Tweed.

which some persons of taste have expressed, that Burns used this dialect in so many other of his compositions. His declared purpose was to paint the manners of rustic life among his "humble compeers," and it is not easy to conceive, that this could have been done with equal humour and effect, if he had not adopted their idiom. There are some, indeed, who will think the subject too low for poetry. Persons of this sickly taste will find their delicacies consulted in many a polite and learned author; let them not seek for gratification in the rough and vigorous lines, in the unbridled humour, or in the overpowering sensibility of this bard of nature.

To determine the comparative merit of Burns would be no easy task. Many persons, afterwards distinguished in literature, have been born in as humble a situation of life; but it would be difficult to find any other who, while earning his subsistence by daily labour, has written verses which have attracted and retained universal attention, and which are likely to give the author a permanent and distinguished place among the followers of the muses. If he is deficient in grace, he is distinguished for ease as well as energy; and these are indications of the higher order of genius. The father of Epic poetry exhibits one of his heroes as

as excelling in strength, another in swiftness—to form his perfect warrior, these attributes are combined. Every species of intellectual superiority admits, perhaps, of a similar arrangement. One writer excels in force—another in ease; he is superior to them both, in whom both these qualities are united. Of Homer himself it may be said, that, like his own Achilles, he surpasses his competitors in mobility as well as strength.

The force of Burns lay in the powers of his understanding, and in the sensibility of his heart; and these will be found to infuse the living principle into all the works of genius which seem destined to immortality. His sensibility had an uncommon range. He was alive to every species of emotion. He is one of the few poets that can be mentioned, who have at once excelled in humour, in tenderness, and in sublimity; a praise unknown to the ancients, and which in modern times is only due to Ariosto, to Shakespeare, and perhaps to Voltaire. To compare the writings of the Scottish peasant with the works of these giants in literature, might appear presumptuous; yet it may be asserted that he has displayed the *foot of Hercules*. How near he might have approached them by proper culture, with lengthened years, and under happier auspices, it is not for us to calculate. But while we run over the melancholy

story

story of his life, it is impossible not to heave a sigh at the asperity of his fortune; and as we survey the records of his mind, it is easy to see, that out of such materials have been reared the fairest and the most durable of the monuments of genius.

A GREAT number of poems have been written on the death of Burns, some of them of considerable poetical merit. To have subjoined all of them to the present edition, would have been to have enlarged it to another volume at least; and to have made a selection, would have been a task of considerable delicacy.

The Editor, therefore, presents one poem only on this melancholy subject; a poem which has not before appeared in print. It is from the pen of one who has sympathized deeply in the fate of Burns, and will not be found unworthy of its author—the Biographer of *Lorenzo de' Medici*. Of a person so well known, it is wholly unnecessary for the Editor to speak; and, if it were necessary, it would not be easy for him to find language that would adequately express his respect and his affection.

REAR high thy bleak majestic hills,
Thy shelter'd valleys proudly spread,
And, SCOTIA, pour thy thousand rills,
And wave thy heaths with blossoms red;
But, ah! what poet now shall tread
Thy airy heights, thy woodland reign,
Since he the sweetest bard is dead
That ever breath'd the soothing strain?

As green thy towering pines may grow,
As clear thy streams may speed along,
As bright thy summer suns may glow,
As gayly charm thy feathery throng;
But now, unheeded is the song,
And dull and lifeless all around,
For his wild-harp lies all unstrung,
And cold the hand that wak'd its sound.

What tho' thy vigorous offspring rise
In arts, in arms, thy sons excel;
Tho' beauty in thy daughters' eyes,
And health in every feature dwell;
Yet who shall now their praises tell,
In strains impassion'd, fond and free,
Since he no more the song shall swell
To love, and liberty, and thee.

With step-dame eye and frown severe
His hapless youth why didst thou view?
For all thy joys to him were dear,
And all his vows to thee were due:
Nor greater bliss his bosom knew,
In opening youth's delightful prime,
Than when thy favouring ear he drew
To listen to his chanted rhyme.

Thy lonely wastes and frowning skies
To him were all with rapture fraught;
He heard with joy the tempest rise
That wak'd him to sublimer thought;
And oft thy winding dells he sought,
Where wild flow'rs pour'd their rathe perfume,
And with sincere devotion brought
To thee the summer's earliest bloom.

But ah! no fond maternal smile
His unprotected youth enjoy'd;
His limbs inur'd to early toil,
His days with early hardships tried;
And more to mark the gloomy void,
And bid him feel his misery,
Before his infant eyes would glide
Day-dreams of immortality.

Yet, not by cold neglect depress'd,
With sinewy arm he turn'd the soil,
Sunk with the evening sun to rest,
And met at morn his earliest smile.
Wak'd by his rustic pipe, meanwhile
The powers of fancy came along,
And sooth'd his lengthen'd hours of toil
With native wit and sprightly song.

—Ah! days of bliss, too swiftly fled,
When vigorous health from labour springs,
And bland contentment smooths the bed,
And sleep his ready opiate brings;
And hovering round on airy wings
Float the light forms of young desire,
That of unutterable things
The soft and shadowy hope inspire.

Now spells of mightier power prepare,
Bid brighter phantoms round him dance;
Let Flattery spread her viewless snare,
And Fame attract his vagrant glance;
Let sprightly Pleasure too advance,
Unveil'd her eyes, unclasp'd her zone,
Till lost in love's delirious trance
He scorn the joys his youth has known.

Let Friendship pour her brightest blaze,
Expanding all the bloom of soul;
And Mirth concentre all her rays,
And point them from the sparkling bowl;
And let the careless moments roll
In social pleasures unconfined,
And Confidence that spurns control
Unlock the inmost springs of mind:

And lead his steps those bowers among,
Where elegance with splendour vies,
Or Science bids her favour'd throng,
To more refin'd sensations rise:
Beyond the peasant's humbler joys,
And freed from each laborious strife,
There let him learn the bliss to prize
That waits the sons of polish'd life.

Then

Then whilst his throbbing veins beat high
With every impulse of delight,
Dash from his lips the cup of joy,
And shroud the scene in shades of night;
And let Despair, with wizard light,
Disclose the yawning gulf below,
And pour incessant on his sight
Her specter'd ills and shapes of woe:

And shew beneath a cheerless shed,
With sorrowing heart and streaming eyes,
In silent grief where droops her head,
The partner of his early joys;
And let his infants' tender cries
His fond parental succour claim,
And bid him hear in agonies
A husband's and a father's name.

'Tis done, the powerful charm succeeds;
His high reluctant spirit bends;
In bitterness of soul he bleeds,
Nor longer with his fate contends.
An idiot laugh the welkin rends
As genius thus degraded lies;
Till pitying Heaven the veil extends
That shrouds the Poet's ardent eyes.

—Rear

—Rear high thy bleak majestic hills,
Thy shelter'd valleys proudly spread,
And, SCOTIA, pour thy thousand rills,
And wave thy heaths with blossoms red;
But never more shall poet tread
Thy airy heights, thy woodland reign,
Since he the sweetest bard is dead
That ever breath'd the soothing strain.

APPENDIX.

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No. I.—Note A. *See p. 4.*

The importance of the national establishment of parish schools in Scotland will justify a short account of the legislative provisions respecting it, especially as the subject has escaped the notice of all the historians.

By an act of the king (James VIth) and privy council, of the 10th of December, 1616, it was recommended to the bishops to *deale and travel* with the heritors (land proprietors), and inhabitants of the respective parishes in their respective dioceses, towards the fixing upon "some certain, solid, and sure course" for settling and entertaining a school in each parish. This was ratified by a statute of Char. I. (the act, 1633, chap. 5.) which empowered the bishop, with the consent of the heritors of a parish,

parish, or of a majority of the inhabitants, if the heritors refused to attend the meeting, to assess every plough of land (that is, every farm in proportion to the number of ploughs upon it) with a certain sum for establishing a school. This was an ineffectual provision, as depending on the consent and pleasure of the heritors and inhabitants. Therefore a new order of things was introduced by *Stat.* 1646, *chap.* 17, which *obliges* the heritors and minister of each parish to meet and assess the several heritors with the requisite sum for building a school-house, and to elect a school-master, and modify a salary for him in all time to come. The salary is ordered not to be under one hundred, nor above two hundred merks, that is, in our present sterling money, not under 5l. 11s. 1½d. nor above 11l. 2s. 3d. and the assessment is to be laid on the land in the same proportion as it is rated for the support of the clergy, and as it regulates the payment of the land-tax. But in case the heritors of any parish, or the majority of them, should fail to discharge this duty, then the persons forming what is called the *Committee of Supply* of the county (consisting of the principal landholders), *or any five of them*, are authorized by the statute to impose the assessment instead of them, on the representation of the presbytery in which the parish is situated. To secure the choice of a proper teacher, the right

right of election by the heritors, by a statute passed in 1693, *chap.* 22, is made subject to the review and control of the presbytery of the district, who have the examination of the person proposed committed to them, both as to his qualifications as a teacher, and as to his proper deportment in the office when settled in it. The election of the heritors is therefore only a presentment of a person for the approbation of the presbytery, who, if they find him unfit, may declare his incapacity, and thus oblige them to elect anew. So far is stated on unquestionable authority.*

The legal salary of the schoolmaster was not inconsiderable at the time it was fixed; but by the decrease in the value of money, it is now certainly inadequate to its object; and it is painful to observe, that the landholders of Scotland resisted the humble application of the schoolmasters to the legislature for its increase, a few years ago. The number of parishes in Scotland is 877; and if we allow the salary of a schoolmaster in each to be, on an average, seven pounds sterling, the amount of the legal provision will be 6,139l. sterling. If we suppose the wages paid by the scholars to amount

* The authority of A. Frazer Tytler, and David Hume, Esqrs.

amount to twice this sum, which is probably beyond the truth, the total of the expenses among 1,526,492 persons (the whole population of Scotland), of this most important establishment, will be 18,417l. But on this, as well as on other subjects respecting Scotland, accurate information may soon be expected from Sir John Sinclair's Analysis of his Statistics, which will complete the immortal monument he has reared to his patriotism.

The benefit arising in Scotland from the instruction of the poor, was soon felt; and by an act of the British Parliament, 4 *Geo.* I. *chap.* 6, it is enacted, "that of the moneys arising from the sale of the Scottish estates forfeited in the rebellion of 1715, 2,000l. sterling shall be converted into a capital stock, the interest of which shall be laid out in erecting and maintaining schools in the Highlands. The Society for propagating Christian Knowledge, incorporated in 1709, have applied a large part of their fund for the same purpose. By their report, 1st May, 1795, the annual sum employed by them, in supporting their schools in the Highlands and Islands, was 3,913l. 19s. 10d., in which are taught the English language, reading and writing, and the principles of religion. The schools of the society are additional to the legal schools, which from the great extent of many

many of the Highland parishes, were found insufficient. Besides these established schools, the lower classes of people in Scotland, where the parishes are large, often combine together, and establish private schools of their own, at one of which it was that Burns received the principal part of his education. So convinced indeed are the poor people of Scotland, by experience, of the benefit of instruction to their children, that, though they may often find it difficult to feed and clothe them, some kind of school instruction they almost always procure them.

The influence of the school establishment of Scotland on the peasantry of that country, seems to have decided by experience a question of legislation of the utmost importance—whether a system of national instruction for the poor be favourable to morals and good government. In the year 1698, Fletcher of Salton declared as follows: "There are at this day in Scotland, two hundred thousand people begging from door to door. And though the number of them be perhaps double to what it was formerly, by reason of this present great distress (a famine then prevailed), yet in all times there have been about one hundred thousand of those vagabonds, who have lived without any regard or subjection either to the laws of the land, or even those

those of God and Nature; fathers incestuously accompanying with their own daughters, the son with the mother, and the brother with the sister." He goes on to say, that no magistrate ever could discover that they had ever been baptized, or in what way one in a hundred went out of the world. He accuses them as frequently guilty of robbery, and sometimes of murder: "In years of plenty," says he, "many thousands of them meet together in the mountains, where they feast and riot for many days; and at country weddings, markets, *burials*, and other public occasions, they are to be seen, both men and women, perpetually drunk, cursing, blaspheming, and fighting together."* This high-minded statesman, of whom it is said by a contemporary, "that he would lose his life readily to save his country, and would not do a base thing to serve it," thought the evil so great, that he proposed as a remedy the revival of domestic slavery, according to the practice of his adored republics in the classic ages! A better remedy has been found, which in the silent lapse of a century has proved effectual. The statute of 1696, the noble legacy of the Scottish Parliament to their country, began soon after this to operate; and happily, as the minds of

* Political Works of Andrew Fletcher, octavo, London, 1737, *p.* 144.

of the poor received instruction, the Union opened new channels of industry, and new fields of action to their view.

At the present day there is perhaps no country in Europe, in which, in proportion to its population, so small a number of crimes fall under the chastisement of the criminal law, as Scotland. We have the best authority for asserting, that on an average of thirty years, preceding the year 1797, the executions in that division of the island did not amount to six annually; and one quarter sessions for the town of Manchester only, has sent, according to Mr. Hume, more felons to the plantations than all the judges of Scotland usually do in the space of a year.* It might appear invidious to attempt a calculation of the many thousand individuals in Manchester and its vicinity who can neither read nor write. A majority of those who suffer the punishment of death for their crimes in every part of England, are, it is believed, in this miserable state of ignorance.

There is now a legal provision for parochial schools, or rather for a school in each of the different townships into which the country is divided,

* Hume's Commentaries on the Laws of Scotland, *Introd. p.* 50.

divided, in several of the northern states of North America. They are, however, of recent origin there, excepting in New England, where they were established in the last century, probably about the same time as in Scotland, and by the same religious sect. In the Protestant Cantons of Switzerland, the peasantry have the advantage of similar schools, though established and endowed in a different manner. This is also the case in certain districts in England, particularly in the northern parts of Yorkshire and of Lancashire, and in the counties of Westmoreland and Cumberland.

A law, providing for the instruction of the poor, was passed by the Parliament of Ireland; but the fund was diverted from its purpose, and the measure was entirely frustrated. *Proh pudor!*

The similarity of character between the Swiss and the Scotch, and between the Scotch and the people of New England, can scarcely be overlooked. That it arises in a great measure from the similarity of their institutions for instruction, cannot be questioned. It is no doubt increased by physical causes. With a superior degree of instruction, each of these nations possesses a country that may be said to be sterile, in the neighbourhood of countries comparatively

comparatively rich. Hence emigrations and the other effects on conduct and character which such circumstances naturally produce. This subject is in a high degree curious. The points of dissimilarity between these nations might be traced to their causes also, and the whole investigation would perhaps admit of an approach to certainty in our conclusions, to which such inquiries seldom lead. How much superior in morals, in intellect, and in happiness, the peasantry of those parts of England are, who have opportunities of instruction, to the same class in other situations; those who inquire into the subject will speedily discover. The peasantry of Westmoreland, and of the other districts mentioned above, if their physical and moral qualities be taken together, are, in the opinion of the Editor, superior to the peasantry of any part of the island.

Note B. See p. 7.

It has been supposed that Scotland is less populous and less improved on account of this emigration; but such conclusions are doubtful, if not wholly fallacious. The principle of population acts in no country to the full extent of its power: marriage is every where retarded beyond the period pointed out by nature, by the difficulty of supporting a family; and this

obstacle is greatest in long-settled communities. The emigration of a part of a people facilitates the marriage of the rest, by producing a relative increase in the means of subsistence. The arguments of Adam Smith, for a free export of corn, are perhaps applicable with less exception to the free export of people. The more certain the event, the greater the cultivation of the soil. This subject has been well investigated by Sir James Stewart, whose principles have been expanded and farther illustrated in a late truly philosophical *Essay on Population.* In fact, Scotland has increased in the number of its inhabitants in the last forty years, as the Statistics of Sir John Sinclair clearly prove, but not in the ratio that some had supposed. The extent of the emigration of the Scots may be calculated with some degree of confidence from the proportionate number of the two sexes in Scotland; a point that may be established pretty exactly by an examination of the invaluable Statistics already mentioned. If we suppose that there is an equal number of male and female natives of Scotland, alive *somewhere or other*, the excess by which the females exceed the males in their own country, may be considered to be equal to the number of Scotsmen living out of Scotland. But though the males born in Scotland be admitted to be as 13 to 12, and though some of the females emigrate

grate as well as the males, this mode of calculating would probably make the number of expatriated Scotsmen, at any one time alive, greater than the truth. The unhealthy climates into which they emigrate, the hazardous services in which so many of them engage, render the mean life of those who leave Scotland (to speak in the language of calculators) not perhaps of half the value of the mean life of those who remain.

Note C. See p. 20.

In the punishment of this offence the Church employed formerly the arm of the civil power. During the reign of James the VIth (James the Ist of England), criminal connexion between unmarried persons was made the subject of a particular statute *(see Hume's Commentaries on the Laws of Scotland, vol. ii. p. 332.)*, which, from its rigour, was never much enforced, and which has long fallen into disuse. When, in the middle of the last century, the Puritans succeeded in the overthrow of the monarchy in both divisions of the island, fornication was a crime against which they directed their utmost zeal. It was made punishable with death in the second instance *(see Blackstone, b. iv. chap. 4. No. 11.)*. Happily this sanguinary statute was swept away along with the other acts of the

Commonwealth, on the restoration of Charles II, to whose temper and manners it must have been peculiarly abhorrent. And after the Revolution, when several salutary acts passed during the suspension of the monarchy, were re-enacted by the Scottish Parliament, particularly that for the establishment of parish-schools, the statute, punishing fornication with death, was suffered to sleep in the grave of the stern fanatics who had given it birth.

Note D. *See p.* 21.

The legitimation of children, by subsequent marriage, became the Roman law under the Christian emperors. It was the canon law of modern Europe, and has been established in Scotland from a very remote period. Thus a child born a bastard, if his parents afterwards marry, enjoys all the privileges of seniority over his brothers afterwards born in wedlock. In the Parliament of Merton, in the reign of Henry III, the English clergy made a vigorous attempt to introduce this article into the law of England, and it was on this occasion that the Barons made the noted answer, since so often appealed to: *Quod nolunt leges Angliæ mutare; quæ huc usque usitatæ sunt et approbatæ.* With regard to what constitutes a marriage, the law of Scotland, as explained, *p.* 21, differs from the Roman law, which required the ceremony to be performed *in facie ecclesiæ.*

No. II.

No. II.

Note A. *See p. 42.*

It may interest some persons to peruse the first poetical production of our Bard, and it is therefore extracted from a kind of common-place book, which he seems to have begun in his twentieth year; and which he entitled, "*Observations, Hints, Songs, Scraps of Poetry, &c. by Robert Burness,* a man who had little art in making money, and still less in keeping it; but was, however, a man of some sense, a great deal of honesty, and unbounded good-will to every creature, rational, or irrational. As he was but little indebted to a scholastic education, and bred at a plough-tail, his performances must be strongly tinctured with his unpolished rustic way of life; but as, I believe, they are really his own, it may be some entertainment to a curious observer of human nature, to see how a ploughman thinks and feels,

feels, under the pressure of love, ambition, anxiety, grief, with the like cares and passions, which, however diversified by the modes and manners of life, operate pretty much alike, I believe, in all the species."

" Pleasing, when youth is long expir'd, to trace
The forms our pencil or our pen design'd,
Such was our youthful air, and shape, and face,
Such the soft image of the youthful mind."

SHENSTONE.

This MS book, to which our poet prefixed this account of himself, and of his intention in preparing it, contains several of his earlier poems, some as they were printed, and others in their embryo state. The song alluded to is as follows:

Tune—'I AM A MAN UNMARRIED.'

O once I lov'd a bonnie lass,
Ay, and I love her still,
And whilst that virtue warms my breast
I'll love my handsome Nell.
Tal lal de ral, &c.

As bonnie lasses I hae seen,
And mony full as braw,
But for a modest gracefu' mien
The like I never saw.

A bonnie

A bonnie lass, I will confess,
Is pleasant to the e'e,
But without some better qualities
She's no a lass for me.

But Nelly's looks are blythe and sweet,
And what is best of a',
Her reputation is complete,
And fair without a flaw.

She dresses ay sae clean and neat,
Both decent and genteel:
And then there's something in her gait
Gars ony dress look weel.

A gaudy dress and gentle air
May slightly touch the heart,
But it's innocence and modesty
That polishes the dart.

'Tis this in Nelly pleases me,
'Tis this enchants my soul;
For absolutely in my breast
She reigns without control.
Tal lal de ral, &c.

It must be confessed that these lines give no indication of the future genius of Burns; but he himself seems to have been fond of them, probably from the recollections they excited.

Note

Note B. p. 52.

At the time that our poet took the resolution of becoming *wise*, he procured a little book of blank paper, with the purpose (expressed on the first page) of making farming memorandums upon it. These farming memorandums are curious enough; many of them have been written with a pencil, and are now obliterated, or at least illegible. A considerable number are however legible, and a specimen may gratify the reader. It must be premised, that the poet kept the book by him several years—that he wrote upon it, here and there, with the utmost irregularity, and that on the same page are notations very distant from each other as to time and place.

* * * * * *

April, 1782.

EXTEMPORE.

O why the deuce should I repine,
And be an ill foreboder;
I'm twenty-three, and five-feet nine,
I'll go and be a sodger.

I gat some gear wi' meikle care,
I held it weel thegither;
But now it's gane, and something mair,
I'll go and be a sodger.

* * * * * *

FRAGMENT.

FRAGMENT.

Tune—'DONALD BLUE.'

O leave novels, ye Mauchline belles,
Ye're safer at your spinning-wheel;
Such witching books are baited hooks,
For rakish rooks like Rob Mossgiel.
Sing tal lal lay, &c.

Your fine *Tom Jones*, and *Grandisons*,
They make your youthful fancies reel,
They heat your brains, and fire your veins,
And then you're prey for Rob Mossgiel.

Beware a tongue that's smoothly hung;
A heart that warmly seems to feel;
That feeling heart but acts a part,
'Tis rakish art in Rob Mossgiel.

The frank address, the soft caress,
Are worse than poison'd darts of steel,
The frank address, and politesse,
Are all finesse in Rob Mossgiel.

* * * * * *

For he's far aboon Dunkel the night
Maun white the stick and a' that.

Mem. To get for Mr. Johnston these two songs:

'*Molly*,

'*Molly, Molly, my dear honey.*'—'*The cock and the hen, the deer in her den,*' &c.

* * * * * *

Ah, Cloris! Sir Peter Halket, of Pitferran, the author. *Note.* He married her—the heiress of Pitferran.

Colonel George Crawford, the author of *Down the Burn Davy.*

Pinkey-house, by J. Mitchell.

My apron Deary! and *Amynta,* by Sir G. Elliot.

Willie was a wanton Wag, was made on Walkinshaw of Walkinshaw, near Paisley.

I loe na a laddie but ane, Mr. Clunzee.

The bonnie wee thing—beautiful—*Lundie's Dream*—very beautiful.

He till't and she till't—assez bien.

Armstrong's Farewell—fine.

The author of the *Highland Queen* was a Mr. M'Iver, purser of the Solboy.

Fife and a' the land about it, R. Fergusson.

The

The author of *The Bush aboon Traquair* was a Dr. Stewart.

Polwart on the Green, composed by Captain John Drummond M'Gregor of Boehaldie.

Mem. To inquire if Mr. Cockburn was the author of *I hae seen the smiling*, &c.

* * * *

The above may serve as a specimen. All the notes on farming are *obliterated.*

Note C. See p. 107.

Rules and Regulations to be observed in the Bachelor's Club.

1st. The club shall meet at Tarbolton every fourth Monday night, when a question on any subject shall be proposed, disputed points of religion, only excepted, in the manner hereafter directed; which question is to be debated in the club, each member taking whatever side he thinks proper.

2d. When the club is met, the president, or, he failing, some one of the members till he come, shall take his seat; then the other members shall seat themselves, those who are for one side

side of the question, on the president's right hand; and those who are for the other side, on his left; which of them shall have the right hand is to be determined by the president. The president and four of the members, being present, shall have power to transact any ordinary part of the society's business.

3d. The club met and seated, the president shall read the question out of the club's book of records (which book is always to be kept by the president), then the two members nearest the president shall cast lots who of them shall speak first, and according as the lot shall determine, the member nearest the president on that side shall deliver his opinion, and the member nearest on the other side shall reply to him; then the second member of the side that spoke first; then the second member of the side that spoke second; and so on to the end of the company; but if there be fewer members on one side than on the other, when all the members of the least side have spoken according to their places, any of them, as they please among themselves, may reply to the remaining members of the opposite side: when both sides have spoken the president shall give his opinion, after which they may go over it a second or more times, and so continue the question.

4th.

4th. The club shall then proceed to the choice of a question for the subject of next night's meeting. The president shall first propose one, and any other member who chooses may propose more questions; and whatever one of them is most agreeable to the majority of the members, shall be the subject of debate next club-night.

5th. The club shall, lastly, elect a new president for the next meeting: the president shall first name one, then any of the club may name another, and whoever of them has the majority of votes shall be duly elected; allowing the president the first vote, and the casting vote upon a par, but none other. Then after a general toast to mistresses of the club, they shall dismiss.

6th. There shall be no private conversation carried on during the time of debate, nor shall any member interrupt another while he is speaking, under the penalty of a reprimand from the president for the first fault, doubling his share of the reckoning for the second, trebling it for the third, and so on in proportion for every other fault, provided always however that any member may speak at any time after leave asked, and given by the president. All swearing and profane language, and particularly all obscene and indecent conversation, is strictly prohibited, under the

the same penalty as aforesaid in the first clause of this article.

7th. No member, on any pretence whatever, shall mention any of the club's affairs to any other person but a brother member, under the pain of being excluded; and particularly if any member shall reveal any of the speeches or affairs of the club, with a view to ridicule or laugh at any of the rest of the members, he shall be for ever excommunicated from the society; and the rest of the members are desired, as much as possible, to avoid, and have no communication with him as a friend or comrade.

8th. Every member shall attend at the meetings, without he can give a proper excuse for not attending; and it is desired that every one who cannot attend, will send his excuse with some other member; and he who shall be absent three meetings without sending such excuse, shall be summoned to the next club-night, when, if he fail to appear, or send an excuse, he shall be excluded.

9th. The club shall not consist of more than sixteen members, all bachelors, belonging to the parish of Tarbolton: except a brother member marry, and in that case he may be continued, if

if the majority of the club think proper. No person shall be admitted a member of this society, without the unanimous consent of the club; and any member may withdraw from the club altogether, by giving a notice to the president in writing of his departure.

10th. Every man proper for a member of this society, must have a frank, honest, open heart; above any thing dirty or mean; and must be a professed lover of one or more of the female sex. No haughty, self-conceited person, who looks upon himself as superior to the rest of the club, and especially no mean-spirited, worldly mortal, whose only will is to heap up money, shall upon any pretence whatever be admitted. In short, the proper person for this society is, a cheerful, honest-hearted lad, who, if he has a friend that is true, and a mistress that is kind, and as much wealth as genteelly to make both ends meet—is just as happy as this world can make him.

Note D. *See p.* 308.

A great number of manuscript poems were found among the papers of Burns, addressed to him by admirers of his genius, from different parts of Britain, as well as from Ireland and America. Among these was a poetical epistle from Mr. Telford,

Telford, of Shrewsbury, of superior merit. It is written in the dialect of Scotland (of which country Mr. Telford is a native), and in the versification generally employed by our poet himself. Its object is to recommend to him other subjects of a serious nature, similar to that of the *Cotter's Saturday Night;* and the reader will find that the advice is happily enforced by example. It would have given the editor pleasure to have inserted the whole of this poem, which he hopes will one day see the light: he is happy to have obtained, in the mean time, his friend Mr. Telford's permission to insert the following extracts:

* * * * * *

Pursue, O Burns! thy happy style,
" Those manner-painting strains," that while
They bear me northward mony a mile,
Recall the days,
When tender joys, with pleasing smile,
Blest my young ways.

I see my fond companions rise,
I join the happy village joys,
I see our green hills touch the skies,
And thro' the woods,
I hear the river's rushing noise,
Its roaring floods.*

No.

---

* The banks of the *Esk*, in Dumfries-shire, are here alluded to. E.

No distant Swiss with warmer glow,
E'er heard his native music flow,
Nor could his wishes stronger grow,
Than still have mine,
When up this ancient mount* I go,
With songs of thine.

O happy Bard! thy gen'rous flame
Was given to raise thy country's fame,
For this thy charming numbers came,
Thy matchless lays;
Then sing, and save her virtuous name,
To latest days.

* * * * * * *

But mony a theme awaits thy muse,
Fine as thy Cotter's sacred views,
Then in such verse thy soul infuse,
With holy air,
And sing the course the pious choose,
With all thy care.

How with religious awe imprest,
They open lay the guileless breast,
And youth and age with fears distrest,
All due prepare,
The symbols of eternal rest
Devout to share.†

* A beautiful little mount, which stands immediately before, or rather forms a part of Shrewsbury castle, a seat of Sir William Pulteney, bart.

† The Sacrament, generally administered in the country parishes of Scotland in the open air. E.

How down ilk lang withdrawing hill,
Successive crowds the valleys fill,
While pure religious converse still
Beguiles the way,
And gives a cast to youthful will,
To suit the day.

How plac'd along the sacred board,
Their hoary pastor's looks ador'd,
His voice with peace and blessing stor'd,
Sent from above,
And faith, and hope, and joy afford,
And boundless love.

O'er this, with warm seraphic glow,
Celestial beings pleased bow,
And, whisper'd, hear the holy vow,
'Mid grateful tears;
And mark amid such scenes below,
Their future peers.

* * * * * * *

O mark the awful solemn scene !*
When hoary winter clothes the plain,
Along the snowy hills is seen
Approaching slow,
In mourning weeds, the village train,
In silent woe.

Some

* A Scottish funeral. E.

Some much-respected brother's bier,
(By turns in pious task they share)
With heavy hearts they forward bear
Along the path;
Where nei'bours saw in dusky air,*
The light of death.

And when they pass the rocky how,
Where binwood bushes o'er them flow,
And move around the rising knowe,
Where far away
The kirk-yard trees are seen to grow,
By th' water brae.

Assembled round the narrow grave,
While o'er them wintry tempests rave,
In the cold wind their gray locks wave,
As low they lay
Their brother's body 'mongst the lave
Of parent clay.

Expressive looks from each declare
The griefs within, their bosoms bear,
One holy bow devout they share,
Then home return,
And think o'er all the virtues fair
Of him they mourn.

* * * * * * *

* This alludes to a superstition prevalent in Eskdale, and Annandale, that a light precedes in the night every funeral, marking the precise path it is to pass. E.

Say how by early lessons taught,
(Truth's pleasing air is willing caught)
Congenial to th' untainted thought,
The shepherd boy,
Who tends his flocks on lonely height,
Feels holy joy.

Is aught on earth so lovely known,
On sabbath morn and far alone,
His guileless soul all naked shown
Before his God—
Such pray'rs must welcome reach the throne,
And blest abode.

O tell! with what a heartfelt joy,
The parent eyes the virtuous boy;
And all his constant kind employ,
Is how to give
The best of lear he can enjoy,
As means to live.

The parish-school, its curious site,
The master who can clear indite,
And lead him on to count and write,
Demand thy care;
Nor pass the ploughman's school at night
Without a share.

Nor yet the tenty curious lad,
Who o'er the ingle hings his head,
And begs of nei'bours books to read;
For hence arise
Thy country's sons, who far are spread,
Baith bauld and wise.

* * * * * * *

The bonny lasses, as they spin,
Perhaps with Allan's sangs begin,
How Tay and Tweed smooth flowing rin
Thro' flowery hows;
Where Shepherd-lads their sweethearts win
With earnest vows.

Or may be, Burns, thy thrilling page
May a' their virtuous thoughts engage,
While playful youth and placid age
In concert join,
To bless the bard, who, gay or sage,
Improves the mind.

* * * * * * *

Long may their harmless, simple ways,
Nature's own pure emotions raise;
May still the dear romantic blaze
Of purest love,
Their bosoms warm to latest days,
And ay improve.

May

May still each fond attachment glow,
O'er woods, o'er streams, o'er hills of snow;
May rugged rocks still dearer grow,
And may their souls
Even love the warlock glens which through
The tempest howls.

To eternize such themes as these,
And all their happy manners seize,
Will every virtuous bosom please,
And high in fame
To future times will justly raise
Thy patriot name.

While all the venal tribes decay,
That bask in flattery's flaunting ray,
The noisome vermin of a day,
Thy works shall gain
O'er every mind a boundless sway,
And lasting reign.

When winter binds the harden'd plains,
Around each hearth, the hoary swains
Shall teach the rising youth thy strains,
And anxious say,
Our blessing with our sons remains,
And BURNS'S LAY!

No. III.

(First inserted in the Second Edition.)

THE Editor has particular pleasure in presenting to the public the following letter, to the due understanding of which a few previous observations are necessary.

The Biographer of Burns was naturally desirous of hearing the opinion of the friend and brother of the poet, on the manner in which he had executed his task, before a second edition should be committed to the press. He had the satisfaction of receiving this opinion, in a letter dated the 24th of August, approving of the Life in very obliging terms, and offering one or two trivial corrections as to names and dates chiefly, which are made in this edition. One or two observations were offered of a different kind. In the 319th page of the first volume, first edition, a quotation is made from the pastoral song, *Ettrick Banks,* and an explanation given of the phrase " mony feck" which occurs in this quotation. Supposing the sense to be complete after " mony," the editor had considered " feck" as a rustic oath which confirmed the assertion. The words were therefore separated by a comma.

Mr.

Mr. Burns considered this an error. "Feck," he presumes, is the Scottish word for quantity, and "mony feck" to mean simply, very many. The editor, in yielding to this authority, expressed some hesitation, and hinted that the phrase "mony feck" was in Mr. Burns's sense a pleonasm or barbarism which deformed this beautiful song.* His reply to this observation makes the first clause of the following letter.

In the same communication he informed me, that the *Mirror* and the *Lounger* were proposed by him to the Conversation Club of Mauchline, and that he had thoughts of giving me his sentiments on the remarks I had made respecting the fitness of such works for such societies. The observations of such a man on such a subject, the editor conceived, would be received with particular interest by the public, and having pressed earnestly for them, they will be found in the following letter. Of the value of this communication, delicacy towards his very respectable correspondent prevents him from expressing his opinion. The original letter is in the hands of Messrs. Cadell and Davies.

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* The correction made by Gilbert Burns has also been suggested by a writer in the Monthly Magazine, under the signature of *Alboin*, who, for taking this trouble, and for mentioning the author of the poem of *Donocht-head*, deserves the Editor's thanks.

Dinning, Dumfries-shire, 24th Oct. 1800.

DEAR SIR,

YOURS of the 17th inst. came to my hand yesterday, and I sit down this afternoon to write you in return: but when I shall be able to finish all I wish to say to you, I cannot tell. I am sorry your conviction is not complete respecting *feck*. There is no doubt that if you take two English words which appear synonymous to *mony feck*, and judge by the rules of English construction, it will appear a barbarism. I believe if you take this mode of translating from any language, the effect will frequently be the same. But if you take the expression *mony feck* to have, as I have stated it, the same meaning with the English expression *very many* (and such license every translator must be allowed, especially when he translates from a simple dialect which has never been subjected to rule, and where the precise meaning of words is of consequence not minutely attended to), it will be well enough. One thing I am certain of, that ours is the sense universally understood in this country; and I believe no Scotsman who has lived contented at home, pleased with the

the simple manners, the simple melodies, and the simple dialect of his native country, unvitiated by foreign intercourse, "whose soul proud science never taught to stray," ever discovered barbarism in the song of Ettrick Banks.

The story you have heard of the gable of my father's house falling down, is simply as follows;*—When my father built his "clay biggin," he put in two stone-jambs, as they are called, and a lintel, carrying up a chimney in his clay-gable. The consequence was, that as the gable subsided, the jambs, remaining firm, threw it off its centre; and, one very stormy morning, when my brother was nine or ten days old, a little before day-light, a part of the gable fell out, and the rest appeared so shattered, that my mother, with the young poet, had to be carried through the storm to a neighbour's house, where they remained a week till their own dwelling was adjusted. That you may not think too meanly of this house, or of my father's taste in building, by supposing the poet's description in the Vision (which is entirely a fancy picture) applicable to it, allow me to take notice to you, that the house consisted

* The editor had heard a report that the poet was born in the midst of a storm which blew down a part of the house. E.

sisted of a kitchen in one end, and a room in the other, with a fire-place and chimney; that my father had constructed a concealed bed in the kitchen, with a small closet at the end, of the same materials with the house, and, when altogether cast over, outside and in, with lime, it had a neat, comfortable appearance, such as no family of the same rank, in the present improved style of living, would think themselves ill-lodged in. I wish likewise to take notice in passing, that although, the "Cotter," in the Saturday night, is an exact copy of my father in his manners, his family devotion, and exhortations, yet the other parts of the description do not apply to our family. None of us were ever "at service out amang the neebors roun'." Instead of our depositing our "sair-won penny-fee" with our parents, my father laboured hard, and lived with the most rigid economy, that he might be able to keep his children at home, thereby having an opportunity of watching the progress of our young minds, and forming in them early habits of piety and virtue, and from this motive alone did he engage in farming, the source of all his difficulties and distresses.

When I threatened you in my last with a long letter on the subject of the books I recommended to the Mauchline club, and the effects of refinement of taste on the labouring classes of

of men, I meant merely that I wished to write you on that subject, with the view that, in some future communication to the public, you might take up the subject more at large, that, by means of your happy manner of writing, the attention of people of power and influence might be fixed on it. I had little expectation, however, that I should overcome my indolence, and the difficulty of arranging my thoughts so far as to put my threat in execution, till some time ago, before I had finished my harvest, having a call from Mr. Ewart,* with a message from you, pressing me to the performance of this task, I thought myself no longer at liberty to decline it, and resolved to set about it with my first leisure. I will now therefore endeavour to lay before you what has occurred to my mind on a subject where people capable of observation, and of placing their remarks in a proper point of view, have seldom an opportunity of making their remarks on real life. In doing this, I may perhaps be led sometimes to write more in the manner of a person communicating information to you which you did not know before, and at other times more in the style of egotism than I would choose to do to any

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* The Editor's friend, Mr. Peter Ewart, of Manchester. E.

any person in whose candour, and even personal good-will, I had less confidence.

There are two several lines of study that open to every man as he enters life: the one, the general science of life, of duty, and of happiness; the other, the particular arts of his employment or situation in society, and the several branches of knowledge therewith connected. This last is certainly indispensable, as nothing can be more disgraceful than ignorance in the way of one's own profession; and whatever a man's speculative knowledge may be, if he is ill-informed there, he can neither be a useful nor a respectable member of society. It is nevertheless true, that "the proper study of mankind is man:" to consider what duties are incumbent on him as a rational creature, and a member of society; how he may increase or secure his happiness; and how he may prevent or soften the many miseries incident to human life. I think the pursuit of happiness is too frequently confined to the endeavour after the acquisition of wealth. I do not wish to be considered as an idle declaimer against riches, which, after all that can be said against them, will still be considered by men of common sense as objects of importance; and poverty will be felt as a sore evil, after all the fine things that can be said of its advantages; on the contrary I am of opinion, that a great

great proportion of the miseries of life arise from the want of economy, and a prudent attention to money, or the ill-directed or intemperate pursuit of it. But however valuable riches may be as the means of comfort, independence, and the pleasure of doing good to others, yet I am of opinion, that they may be, and frequently are, purchased at too great a cost, and that sacrifices are made in the pursuit, which the acquisition cannot compensate. I remember hearing my worthy teacher, Mr. Murdoch, relate an anecdote to my father, which I think sets this matter in a strong light, and perhaps was the origin, or at least tended to promote this way of thinking in me. When Mr. Murdoch left Alloway, he went to teach and reside in the family of an opulent farmer who had a number of sons. A neighbour coming on a visit, in the course of conversation asked the father how he meant to dispose of his sons. The father replied, that he had not determined. The visitor said, that were he in his place he would give them all good education and send them abroad, without (perhaps) having a precise idea where. The father objected, that many young men lost their health in foreign countries, and many their lives. True, replied the visitor, but as you have a number of sons, it will be strange if some one of them does not live and make a fortune.

Let

Let any person who has the feelings of a father comment on this story: but though few will avow, even to themselves, that such views govern their conduct, yet do we not daily see people shipping off their sons (and who would do so by their daughters also, if there were any demand for them), that they may be rich or perish?

The education of the lower classes is seldom considered in any other point of view than as the means of raising them from that station to which they were born, and of making a fortune. I am ignorant of the mysteries of the art of acquiring a fortune without any thing to begin with, and cannot calculate, with any degree of exactness, the difficulties to be surmounted, the mortifications to be suffered, and the degradation of character to be submitted to, in lending one's self to be the minister of other people's vices, or in the practice of rapine, fraud, oppression, or dissimulation, in the progress; but even when the wished-for end is attained, it may be questioned whether happiness be much increased by the change. When I have seen a fortunate adventurer of the lower ranks of life returned from the East or West Indies, with all the hauteur of a vulgar mind accustomed to be served by slaves, assuming a character, which, from the early habits of life, he is ill fitted to support, displaying magnificence which raises the envy of

of some, and the contempt of others; claiming an equality with the great, which they are unwilling to allow; inly pining at the precedence of the hereditary gentry; maddened by the polished insolence of some of the unworthy part of them; seeking pleasure in the society of men who can condescend to flatter him, and listen to his absurdity for the sake of a good dinner and good wine; I cannot avoid concluding, that his brother, or companion, who, by a diligent application to the labours of agriculture, or some useful mechanic employment, and the careful husbanding of his gains, has acquired a competence in his station, is a much happier, and, in the eye of a person who can take an enlarged view of mankind, a much more respectable man.

But the votaries of wealth may be considered as a great number of candidates striving for a few prizes, and whatever addition the successful may make to their pleasure or happiness, the disappointed will always have more to suffer, I am afraid, than those who abide contented in the station to which they were born. I wish, therefore, the education of the lower classes to be promoted and directed to their improvement as men, as the means of increasing their virtue, and opening to them new and dignified sources of pleasures and happiness. I have heard some people

people object to the education of the lower classes of men, as rendering them less useful, by abstracting them from their proper business; others, as tending to make them saucy to their superiors, impatient of their condition, and turbulent subjects; while you, with more humanity, have your fears alarmed, lest the delicacy of mind, induced by that sort of education and reading I recommend, should render the evils of their situation insupportable to them. I wish to examine the validity of each of these objections, beginning with the one you have mentioned.

I do not mean to controvert your criticism of my favourite books the Mirror and Lounger, although I understand there are people who think themselves judges, who do not agree with you. The acquisition of knowledge, except what is connected with human life and conduct, or the particular business of his employment, does not appear to me to be the fittest pursuit for a peasant. I would say with the poet,

"How empty learning, and how vain is art,
Save where it guides the life, or mends the heart!"

There seems to be a considerable latitude in the use of the word taste. I understand it to be the perception and relish of beauty, order, or any other thing, the contemplation of which

gives pleasure and delight to the mind. I suppose it is in this sense you wish it to be understood. If I am right, the taste which these books are calculated to cultivate (beside the taste for fine writing, which many of the papers tend to improve and to gratify), is what is proper, consistent, and becoming in human character and conduct, as almost every paper relates to these subjects.

I am sorry I have not these books by me, that I might point out some instances. I remember two; one, the beautiful story of La Roche, where, beside the pleasure one derives from a beautiful simple story told in M'Kenzie's happiest manner, the mind is led to taste, with heartfelt rapture, the consolation to be derived in deep affliction, from habitual devotion and trust in Almighty God. The other, the story of General W——, where the reader is led to have a high relish for that firmness of mind which disregards appearances, the common forms and vanities of life, for the sake of doing justice in a case which was out of the reach of human laws.

Allow me then to remark, that if the morality of these books is subordinate to the cultivation of taste; that taste, that refinement of mind and delicacy of sentiment which they are intended to give, are the strongest guard and surest foundation

foundation of morality and virtue. Other moralists guard, as it were, the overt act; these papers, by exalting duty into sentiment, are calculated to make every deviation from rectitude and propriety of conduct, painful to the mind,

> "Whose temper'd powers,
> Refine at length, and every passion wears
> A chaster, milder, more attractive mien."

I readily grant you that the refinement of mind which I contend for, increases our sensibility to the evils of life! but what station of life is without its evils! There seems to be no such thing as perfect happiness in this world, and we must balance the pleasure and the pain which we derive from taste, before we can properly appreciate it in the case before us. I apprehend that on a minute examination it will appear, that the evils peculiar to the lower ranks of life, derive their power to wound us, more from the suggestions of false pride, and the "contagion of luxury, weak and vile," than the refinement of our taste. It was a favourite remark of my brother's, that there was no part of the constitution of our nature, to which we were more indebted, than that by which "*custom makes things familiar and easy*" (a copy Mr. Murdoch used to set us to write), and there is little labour which custom will not make easy to a man in health, if he is not ashamed of his employment,

or

or does not begin to compare his situation with those he may see going about at their ease.

But the man of enlarged mind feels the respect due to him as a man; he has learned that no employment is dishonourable in itself; that while he performs aright the duties of that station in which God has placed him, he is as great as a king in the eyes of Him whom he is principally desirous to please; for the man of taste, who is constantly obliged to labour, must of necessity be religious. If you teach him only to reason, you may make him an atheist, a demagogue, or any vile thing; but if you teach him to feel, his feelings can only find their proper and natural relief in devotion and religious resignation. He knows that those people who are to appearance at ease, are not without their share of evils, and that even toil itself is not destitute of advantages. He listens to the words of his favourite poet:

"O mortal man, that livest here by toil,
Cease to repine and grudge thy hard estate;
That like an emmet thou must ever moil,
Is a sad sentence of an ancient date;
And, certes, there is for it reason great;
Although sometimes it makes thee weep and wail,
And curse thy star, and early drudge and late;
Withouten that would come an heavier bale,
Loose life, unruly passions, and diseases pale!"

And,

And, while he repeats the words, the grateful recollection comes across his mind, how often he has derived ineffable pleasure from the sweet song of "Nature's darling child." I can say, from my own experience, that there is no sort of farm-labour inconsistent with the most refined and pleasurable state of the mind that I am acquainted with, thrashing alone excepted. That, indeed, I have always considered as insupportable drudgery, and think the ingenious mechanic who invented the thrashing machine, ought to have a statue among the benefactors of his country, and should be placed in the niche next to the person who introduced the culture of potatoes into this island.

Perhaps the thing of most importance in the education of the common people is, to prevent the intrusion of artificial wants. I bless the memory of my worthy father for almost every thing in the dispositions of my mind, and my habits of life, which I can approve of; and for none more than the pains he took to impress my mind with the sentiment, that nothing was more unworthy the character of a man, than that his happiness should in the least depend on what he should eat or drink. So early did he impress my mind with this, that although I was as fond of sweetmeats as children generally are, yet I seldom laid out any of the half-pence which relations

lations or neighbours gave me at fairs, in the purchase of them; and if I did, every mouthful I swallowed was accompanied with shame and remorse; and to this hour I never indulge in the use of any delicacy, but I feel a considerable degree of self-reproach and alarm for the degradation of the human character. Such a habit of thinking I consider as of great consequence, both to the virtue and happiness of men in the lower ranks of life. And thus, Sir, I am of opinion, that if their minds are early and deeply imprest with a sense of the dignity of man, as such; with the love of independence and of industry, economy and temperance, as the most obvious means of making themselves independent, and the virtues most becoming their situation, and necessary to their happiness; men in the lower ranks of life may partake of the pleasures to be derived from the perusal of books calculated to improve the mind and refine the taste, without any danger of becoming more unhappy in their situation, or discontented with it. Nor do I think there is any danger of their becoming less useful. There are some hours every day that the most constant labourer is neither at work nor asleep. These hours are either appropriated to amusement or to sloth. If a taste for employing these hours in reading were cultivated, I do not suppose that the return to labour would be more difficult. Every one will

will allow, that the attachment to idle amusements, or even to sloth, has as powerful a tendency to abstract men from their proper business, as the attachment to books; while the one dissipates the mind, and the other tends to increase its powers of self-government. To those who are afraid that the improvement of the minds of the common people might be dangerous to the state, or the established order of society, I would remark, that turbulence and commotion are certainly very inimical to the feelings of a refined mind. Let the matter be brought to the test of experience and observation. Of what description of people are mobs and insurrections composed? Are they not universally owing to the want of enlargement and improvement of mind among the common people? Nay, let any one recollect the characters of those who formed the calmer and more deliberate associations, which lately gave so much alarm to the government of this country. I suppose few of the common people who were to be found in such societies, had the education and turn of mind I have been endeavouring to recommend. Allow me to suggest one reason for endeavouring to enlighten the minds of the common people. Their morals have hitherto been guarded by a sort of dim religious awe, which from a variety of causes seems wearing off. I think the alteration in this respect considerable,

siderable, in the short period of my observation. I have already given my opinion of the effects of refinement of mind on morals and virtue. Whenever vulgar minds begin to shake off the dogmas of the religion in which they have been educated, the progress is quick and immediate to downright infidelity: and nothing but refinement of mind can enable them to distinguish between the pure essence of religion, and the gross systems which men have been perpetually connecting it with. In addition to what has already been done for the education of the common people of this country, in the establishment of parish schools, I wish to see the salaries augmented in some proportion to the present expense of living, and the earnings of people of similar rank, endowments and usefulness, in society; and I hope that the liberality of the present age will be no longer disgraced by refusing, to so useful a class of men, such encouragement as may make parish schools worth the attention of men fitted for the important duties of that office. In filling up the vacancies, I would have more attention paid to the candidate's capacity of reading the English language with grace and propriety; to his understanding thoroughly, and having a high relish for the beauties of English authors, both in poetry and prose; to that good sense and knowledge of human nature which would enable him to acquire some

some influence on the minds and affections of his scholars; to the general worth of his character, and the love of his king and his country, than to his proficiency in the knowledge of Latin and Greek. I would then have a sort of high English class established, not only for the purpose of teaching the pupils to read in that graceful and agreeable manner that might make them fond of reading, but to make them understand what they read, and discover the beauties of the author, in composition and sentiment. I would have established in every parish a small circulating library, consisting of the books which the young people had read extracts from in the collections they had read at school, and any other books well calculated to refine the mind, improve the moral feelings, recommend the practice of virtue, and communicate such knowledge as might be useful and suitable to the labouring classes of men. I would have the schoolmaster act as librarian, and in recommending books to his young friends, formerly his pupils, and letting in the light of them upon their young minds, he should have the assistance of the minister. If once such education were become general, the low delights of the public-house, and other scenes of riot and depravity, would be contemned and neglected, while industry, order, cleanliness, and every virtue which taste and independence of mind

could recommend, would prevail and flourish. Thus possessed of a virtuous and enlightened populace, with high delight I should consider my native country as at the head of all the nations of the earth, ancient or modern.

Thus, Sir, have I executed my threat to the fullest extent, in regard to the length of my letter. If I had not presumed on doing it more to my liking, I should not have undertaken it; but I have not time to attempt it anew; nor, if I would, am I certain that I should succeed any better. I have learned to have less confidence in my capacity of writing on such subjects.

I am much obliged by your kind inquiries about my situation and prospects. I am much pleased with the soil of this farm, and with the terms on which I possess it. I receive great encouragement likewise in building, enclosing, and other conveniencies, from my landlord Mr. G. S. Monteith, whose general character and conduct, as a landlord and country gentleman, I am highly pleased with. But the land is in such a state as to require a considerable immediate outlay of money in the purchase of manure, the grubbing of brush-wood, removing of stones, &c., which twelve years' struggle with a farm of a cold ungrateful soil has but ill prepared me for. If I can get these things done, however,

however, to my mind, I think there is next to a certainty that in five or six years I shall be in a hopeful way of attaining a situation which I think as eligible for happiness as any one I know; for I have always been of opinion, that if a man bred to the habits of a farming life, who possesses a farm of good soil, on such terms as enables him easily to pay all demands, is not happy, he ought to look somewhere else than to his situation for the causes of his uneasiness.

I beg you will present my most respectful compliments to Mrs. Currie, and remember me to Mr. and Mrs. Roscoe, and Mr. Roscoe, jun., whose kind attentions to me, when in Liverpool, I shall never forget.

I am, dear Sir,

Your most obedient,

and much obliged

humble servant,

GILBERT BURNS.

To James Currie, M. D. F. R. S.
Liverpool.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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